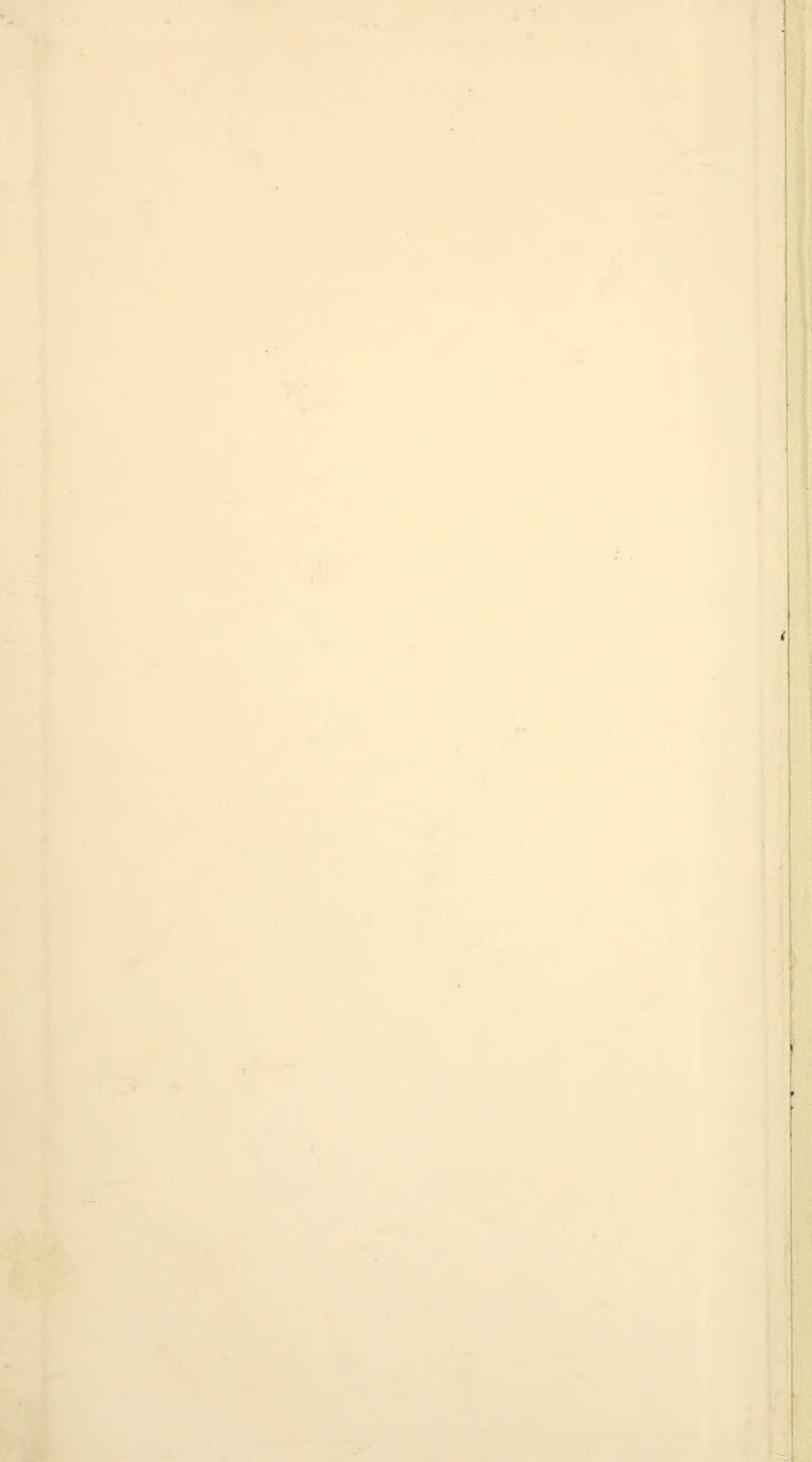




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HELPS TO COMPOSITION;

OR,

SIX HUNDRED

SKELETONS OF SERMONS;

SEVERAL

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SERMONS PREACHED

BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M. A.

Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

ST. PAUL.

VOL. IV.

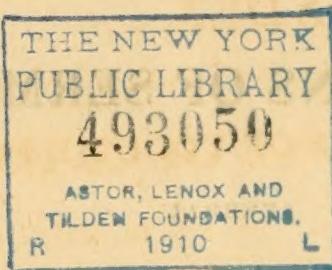
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WARNINGS.

CCCXLIII. GOD'S VOICE TO SINNERS.

Amos iii. 8. The lion hath roared; who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?

THERE is not any thing more strange and unreasonable than that utter disregard which is shewn to the word of God. If we see appearances in the sky, we can form some judgment of the weather: if we take notice of common occurrences in the world, we can draw plain and obvious conclusions from them. The prophet justly observes,^a that if a lion roar, we conclude he has taken, or is about to seize, his prey: if a bird be caught in a snare, we take for granted that the snare was laid with that design: if an alarm be given in a city, we suppose that there is reason for that alarm: or if any disastrous events have taken place, we consider it as ordered by an over-ruling Providence. Yet, when God speaks in his word, we imagine that there is no occasion for it, nor any need to regard it. But it becomes us to attend with reverence to all his messages, whether of wrath or mercy. Whatever he has revealed to us by his servants the prophets, he will surely do: and they are commanded to make known his determinations, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear." Hence the prophet Amos, desirous at once to expose the obstinacy of the unbelieving Jews, and to vindicate his own faithfulness towards them, addresses himself to their consciences in this animated expostulation, this convincing apology.

To bring home his words to our own hearts, we shall consider

I. What God hath spoken to us

[There is no description of persons whose character God has not delineated, and whose end he has not determined.]

^a Ver. 4—6.

And it would be a pleasing task to exemplify this remark in the divine declarations concerning the righteous: but God's voice in the text is compared to the roaring of a lion: on which account we must confine ourselves rather to his denunciations of wrath and vengeance which he will execute on the ungodly.

What then hath he spoken to *profane sinners*?^b Alas! how numerous their classes! how dangerous their self-deceptions! how awful their end!^c And is not such a declaration more terrible than the roaring of a lion? Let us then hear and "fear."^d

To *self-righteous pharisees* his voice is not less tremendous. In the parable addressed to those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," the preference given to the self-condemning sinner is strongly marked; and God's determination to "abase the self-exalting" is plainly declared.^e Yes; before God, and angels, and men, shall such characters be abased in the day of judgment, when publicans and harlots shall be admitted into heaven before them.^f Is not this a just ground of fear to those, whose hearts are not broken with a sense of sin?

But more dreadful still are the threatenings denounced against *hypocritical professors of religion*. Their doom is characterized as the most severe of any:^g and the wrath which they heap up to themselves, while they imprison the truth in unrighteousness, is beyond measure great.^h Let the proud and passionate, the malicious and revengeful, the worldly and covetous, the impure and sensual professor hear this: and let them know, that the Lamb of God will be a lion to them, if they walk not more worthy of their high calling.ⁱ

There is however one description of persons, against whom God's threatenings are more awful still. He declares that *negligent and unfaithful ministers* shall perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls committed to their charge. The blood of all whom they had neglected to warn shall be required at their hands.^k Surely if the voice of God to others be as the roaring of a lion, to *these* it is rather as the voice of thunder. O, that it might be for ever sounding in the ears of ministers, till there should not be found one negligent or unfaithful in the Christian church!]

II. What effect it should have upon us

[With respect to *Ministers*, should they not fear? Does it become them, in the very face of such warnings, to in-

^b 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. ^c See also Eph. v. 3—6. ^d Deut. xxxi. 12, 13.

^e Luke xviii. 9—14. ^f Matt. xxi. 31. ^g Matt. xxiv. 51.

^h Job xxxvi. 13. ⁱ Ps. l. 16—22, with Hos. xii. 6—8.

^j Ezek. xxxiii. 6.

dulge a slothful spirit, or to withhold the truth from their people through fear of offending them? Ought they, however their hearers may wish it, to speak smooth things to them, and to prophesy deceits?¹ Should they be intent on feeding themselves rather than the flock;^m and be more studious to establish a reputation as preachers, than to save the souls committed to them? Surely when it is considered whose ambassadors they are, and to whom they must give account, and what must be their doom if any perish through their neglect; they can never study too earnestly to approve themselves to God,ⁿ that they may give up their account to him with joy, and not with grief.^o

With respect to *others*, of whatever description they may be, it becomes them well to fear, when "THE LORD GOD," the almighty and immutable Jehovah, speaks to them such momentous truths.^p

What is there that can justify any man in casting off the fear of God? Can we deny that he hath roared as a lion? or are we stronger than he, that we dare to provoke him to jealousy?^q Or can we elude his search, when he shall summon us to his judgment-seat?^r Or have we any reason to doubt whether he will execute his threatenings?^s

Let every one rest assured, that it were far better that a roaring lion should rush out of a thicket to devour him, or that the artillery of a whole army should be pointed at him, than that one single threatening of almighty God should be in force against him: for as his destruction is more certain, so will it be infinitely more tremendous.]

ADDRESS

1. Be not averse to hear the terrors of God's law

[Though, of themselves, the threatenings of God's word will never produce true contrition, yet it is necessary that all should know what the Lord God saith concerning them, in order that they may feel their need of a Saviour. In this respect, the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ:^t and if, by hearing of the wrath to come, we be induced to flee from it, we shall have reason to bless the watchman that sounded the alarm.]

2. Be thankful to God for the promises of the gospel

[Blessed be God, the gospel is full of "exceeding great and precious promises;" and "*to him that trembleth at God's*

¹ Isa. xxx. 10, 11.

^m Ezek. xxxiv. 2, 3, 10.

ⁿ 2 Tim. ii. 15. Acts xx. 28.

^o Heb. xiii. 17.

^p There is a peculiar emphasis in the name by which Jehovah is here called. See also Jer. v. 21, 22. and Rev. xv. 3, 4.

^q 1 Cor. x. 22.

^r Jer. xxiii. 24. and Job xxxiv. 22. and

Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

^s Ezek. xxiv. 14.

^t Gal. iii. 24.

word" these promises are made.^a Let not then a slavish dread of God's wrath keep us from embracing the overtures of his mercy. Let us rather flee to Christ the more earnestly, in proportion as we see our guilt and danger. The Israelites were commended by God himself for making this improvement of his terrors.^x And, if we have Christ as our mediator and advocate, we have nothing to fear from heaven, earth, or hell.]

^a Isaiah lxvi. 2.

* Deut. v. 25, 26, 28.

CCCXLIV. GOD WILL FULFIL HIS WORD.

Numb. xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he should lie.*

THERE is scarcely any thing that more strongly manifests the depravity of our nature, than that propensity to lying which we perceive in children, as soon as they begin to speak.^a Even when men are grown to the full exercise of their reason, they too often deviate from truth, sometimes through forgetfulness, sometimes from a change of sentiment or inclination, and sometimes from an inability to perform their word. Hence it is characteristic of man to lie: and we are all so sensible of this, that in matters of great importance we require of men an oath to confirm their word, and enter into written covenants with them, which we take care to have properly attested.^b

Now we are apt to "think that God is even such an one as ourselves;" and that he also may be prevailed upon to "alter the word that is gone out of his lips." Balak evidently entertained this idea of him; and laboured by many repeated sacrifices to divert him from his purpose. But Balaam was inspired to declare the vanity of such an hope, and to assert in a most humiliating comparison the unchangeableness of Jehovah.

To unfold the full meaning of his words, we observe
I. Some men think that God will lie

God has told us with strong and repeated asseverations, that "we must be born again"^c— — — But this is totally disbelieved by

^a Ps. Iviii. 3.

^b Heb. vi. 16. Gal. iii. 15.

^c John iii. 3. See the full import of this in Skel. 221.

1. The profane

[They persuade themselves, that such strictness in religion as is implied in the new birth, is not necessary; and that they shall go to heaven in their own way———]

2. The self-righteous

[These consider regeneration as a dream of weak enthusiasts; and are satisfied with “the form of godliness without” ever experiencing “the power of it”———]

3. The hypocritical professors of religion

[These, having changed their creed together with their outward conduct, fancy themselves Christians, notwithstanding their faith neither overcomes the world,” nor “works by love,” nor “purifies their hearts”———

That all these persons think God will lie, is evident beyond a doubt: for if they really believed that “old things must pass away, and all things become new”^d before they can enter into the kingdom of heaven, they would feel concerned to know whether any such change had taken place in them; nor would they ever be satisfied till they had a scriptural evidence that they were indeed “new creatures in Christ Jesus.” But as this is in no respect the case with them, it is manifest that they “do not believe the record of God,” and consequently, however harsh the expression may seem, “they make God a liar.”^e]

While some do not hesitate to entertain these dishonourable thoughts of God

II. Others fear he may lie

This is common with persons

1. Under conviction of sin

[When men are deeply convinced of sin, they find it exceeding difficult to rest simply on the promises of the gospel. God promises to cast out none who come to him by Christ Jesus; to wash them from sins of deepest die; and to bestow on them all the blessings of salvation freely “without money and without price.”^f Now this appears too good to be true: they cannot conceive how God should “justify the ungodly,”^g and therefore they seek to become godly first, in order that they may be justified: and if they cannot bring some price in their hands, they keep back, and give themselves over to desponding fears———]

2. Under temptation or desertion

[God has declared that “he will not suffer his people to be tempted above what they are able to bear.”^h But when

^d 2 Cor. v. 17.

^e 1 John v. 10.

^f John vi. 37. Isaiah i. 18.

^g Rom. iv. 5.

^h 1 Cor. x. 13.

and Iv. 1.

they come into temptation, they are apt to say, as David, “I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul.”ⁱ They see no way for their escape; and therefore they fear that the very next wave will overwhelm them utterly———

If God at these seasons hide his face from them, they conclude “there is no hope;” they think “his mercy clean gone for ever, and his loving-kindness come utterly to an end for evermore,”^k notwithstanding God has so frequently and so expressly declared, that he will never leave them nor forsake them!———

Now these persons do not, like the ungodly, deliberately *think* that God *will* lie; but they have many misgiving *fears* lest he *should*: and that they do so is obvious; for, if they did not, they would take God at his word, and “stay themselves on him when they are in darkness, and have no light.”^m]

Thus generally is the veracity of him who is truth itself, either questioned or denied

III. But God neither will nor can lie

It is humiliating beyond expression that ministers should be forced to vindicate the veracity of God. But as he himself has seen fit to do so in the sacred oracles, and as the unbelief of men is so inveterate, we submit to the necessity, and proceed to shew that

1. He will not lie

[First, let us hear *the testimonies of those who have tried him*. Had ever any one more opportunities of proving his fidelity than Moses, Joshua, and Samuel? Yet they all attest in the most solemn manner that he neither had deceived them in any thing, nor ever would!———

Next, let us attend to *God's own assertions and appeals*!———Would he ever venture to speak thus strongly on his own behalf, if his creatures could make good their accusations against him?

Lastly, let us look to *matter of fact*. He threatened to punish the angels if they should prove disobedient: he denounced a curse on Adam if he should eat of the forbidden tree: he threatened to destroy the whole world with a deluge; and to overwhelm Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone; and to scatter his once chosen people over the face of the whole earth. See now whether he has forborne to execute any of these threatenings? He also promised to send his only dear Son to die for sinners; and to make him great

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

^k Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^l Heb. xiii. 5.

^m Isaiah i. 10.

ⁿ Deut. xxxii. 4. Josh. xxiii. 14. 1 Sam. xv. 29.

^o Isai. v. 4. and xl ix. 19.

among the Gentiles, while his own nation should almost universally reject him. Have either of these promises been forgotten? Or, if such promises, and such threatenings, have received their accomplishment, is there any reason to doubt respecting any other that are yet unfulfilled? Are not his past actions so many types and pledges of what he will hereafter perform?^{q]}

2. He cannot lie

[Truth is as essential to the divine nature as goodness, wisdom, power, or any other attribute; so that he can as easily cease to be good, or wise, or powerful, as he can suffer "one jot or tittle of his word to fail." If for one moment he could divest himself of truth, he would cease to be deserving of all confidence or affection. Let it only be said of any man, "he is great, and wise, and generous, but no dependence can be placed on his word," would he not on the whole be deemed a contemptible character? How then would Jehovah be degraded, if any such infirmity could be laid to his charge!]

It should seem that St. Paul was peculiarly solicitous to guard us against entertaining the smallest possible doubt of the divine veracity; for he abounds in expressions declarative of this perfection. "God," says he, "cannot lie;"^q and again, "he cannot deny himself;"^r and again in still stronger terms, "It is impossible for God to lie."^s Nor let it be thought that this detracts from God's power: for to be able to lie, would be a weakness rather than a perfection: and as it is man's disgrace that he is prone to violate his word; so it is God's honour that he neither will nor can lie.]

INFER

1. How vain are the expectations of unconverted men!

[Men, whatever may be their state, persuade themselves that they shall be happy when they die. But how delusive must be that hope, which is built upon the expectation that God will prove himself a liar! Who are we, that God should (if we may so speak) undify himself for us? And what security should we have if he were even to admit us into heaven in direct opposition to his own word? Might he not change his word again, and cast us into hell at last? Surely heaven would be no heaven, if it were held on so precarious a tenure. Let us then lay aside all such delusive hopes. Let us learn to tremble at God's word; and seek to attain that entire change

^p 2 Peter ii. 4—9. Jude vii. Πρόκεινται δεῖγμα.

^q Tit. i. 2.

^r 2 Tim. ii.

^s Heb. vi. 18.

both of heart and life, to which the promises of salvation are annexed.]

2. How groundless are the fears of the converted!

[There is a holy fear or jealousy that is highly desirable for every one, however eminent, however established. But there is a tormenting slavish fear that arises from unbelief, and which greatly retards our progress in the divine life. Now we ask, Does this fear arise from an apprehension of our own unfaithfulness, or of God's? If it be God's faithfulness that we doubt, let us know that "his gifts and callings are *without repentance*,"^t and that "where he hath begun a good work he will perfect it unto the day of Christ."^u If, on the other hand, we suspect our own faithfulness, let us recollect on whom our faithfulness depends: if it depend wholly on ourselves, who amongst us will be sayed?^v Thanks be to God, he who has been the author of our faith, has engaged to be the finisher of it;^y and has promised, not only that he will not depart from us, but that he will put his fear in our hearts, so that we shall not depart from him.^z Let us then "set to our seal that God is true."^a Let us commit ourselves to him, knowing in whom we have believed,^b and assured that, while we stand on the foundation of his word, we are immovably secure.^c]

^t Compare Rom. xi. 29. with the words following the text.

^u Phil. i. 6. ^v 2 Cor. iii. 5. Zech. iv. 6. ^w Heb. xii. 2. Zech.

^x Jer. xxxii. 39, 40. ^y John iii. 33.

iv. 9.

^b 2 Tim. i. 12.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 19.

CCCXLV. THE POTTER'S POWER OVER THE CLAY.

Jer. xviii. 6. O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel.

WHILE the grandeur of the heavenly bodies fills us with a sense of our own insignificance,^a we may learn many instructive lessons from the meanest creatures upon earth—The instinctive wisdom of the crane or swallow, the provident care of the ant, and the grateful acknowledgments of the ox and ass, are proposed to us as models for our imitation^b—Nor are works of art less capa-

^a Ps. viii. 3, 4.

^b Jer. viii. 7. Prov. vi. 6—8. Isaiah i. 3.

ble of suggesting useful hints to a reflecting mind—In the passage before us the Prophet was commanded to observe a potter forming his vessels—And to declare to the Jews that they were, notwithstanding all their boasted strength, as much subject to the will of God as the clay was to the potter's will—To illustrate this we shall shew

I. The power of God over us

We can scarcely conceive any greater power than the potter has over the clay—He forms, or mars, or varies the shape of his vessels, as he pleases—Such is God's power over us

1. Individually considered

[Every man is altogether in the hands of God—Our bodies are instantly brought low, when he sends a fierce disease to prey upon them—Nor can the physician's aid profit us, till he be pleased to bless the means prescribed—Our souls are also entirely dependent upon him. When his time is come, the obdurate relent, the dead arise, the drooping are comforted, and the weak established—Till then, the Bible is a sealed book, and the most faithful ministers are only as sounding brass^d]—

2. In our collective capacity

[The most flourishing families, how soon are they brought low!—And how speedily may they be restored to their former prosperity!^e—Nor are the most powerful kingdoms less at his disposal—He can raise a mighty empire from the most contemptible beginnings^f—Or reduce it to utter ruin in a single hour^g—As the smallest motion of the finger suffices to effect any change upon the potter's clay, so the secret volition of the Almighty operates with irresistible energy through the whole creation—]

This truth being universally admitted, we shall proceed to shew

II. What effect the consideration of it should produce upon us

Every perfection of the Deity should occasion some correspondent emotion in our hearts—The thought of his unbounded power over us should lead us

^c Job xxxiii. 19—25.

^d Ps. cvii. 12—20.

^e Job i. 18, 19, and xlvi. 12, 13. ^f Isaiah ii. 1, 2. Deut. vii. 7.

^g 2 Kings xix. 35. Exod. xiv. 28. If this be the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the circumstances of the nation may properly be adverted to in this place.

1. To submit to him

[Many of his dispensations are very opposite to our carnal wishes—But we shall not presume ever to arraign his ways—His express command, and the example of his most eminent saints, should regulate our conduct^h—This is repeatedly taught us under the very image which we are now consideringⁱ—O that under every affliction, personal or public, we may say, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good^k]—

2. To trust in him

[We are but too apt in our difficulties to forget that there is an over-ruling providence—But the consideration of God's power would be an effectual antidote to all carnal fears^l—Hence so many encouraging expostulations in the prophets^m—God assured his people that as there was no state so secure but it should be reversed, if they became self-confident; so there was none so desperate, but that they should be delivered out of it, if they placed their confidence in himⁿ—Thus, however dreadful our condition be, the thought of his being our potter must encourage our believing applications to him^o]—

3. To yield up ourselves to his service

[God wants nothing but to mould us according to his gospel—For this end it is that he afflicts us in such a variety of ways—He expressly pointed out this as the one object which he wished to accomplish with respect to those to whom the text was addressed^p—Let us then remember that we are at this instant in the potter's hands—We are fashioning every moment either for heaven or hell—And as he has a power, so has he a right, to form us for either of those places^q—Let us then pray that we may not be “vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, but vessels of mercy prepared unto glory”—Let us examine ourselves whether we be “vessels of honour or of dishonour?”^r—Let us not rest in fair appearances, but seek for solid evidences—Let us tremble lest we be found at last “vessels wherein he has no pleasure”—And lest, notwithstanding all our profession, he dash us in pieces with a rod of iron^s]—

^h Ps. xlvi. 10. Lev. x. 3.

ⁱ Isaiah xlvi. 9. Rom. ix. 19—21.

^l 1 Sam. iii. 18.

^j 1 Isaiah li. 12, 13.

^m Isaiah xl. 27—31.

ⁿ Compare Isaiah x. 4. and xiv. 2. latter part.

^o Isaiah lxiv. 7, 8.

^p Ver. 11.

^q Rom. ix. 20—23.

^r 2 Tim. ii. 20—21.

^s Psalm ii. 9. Rev. ii. 27.

CCCXLVI. THE DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE OF SINNERS.

Eccl. ix. 18. One sinner destroyeth much good.

THE influence of every man in his sphere is considerable. Solomon had seen a remarkable instance of a poor man delivering by his wisdom a small and ill-garrisoned city from the besieging army of a very powerful monarch. From hence he was led to consider the superiority of wisdom above wealth or power. On the other hand, he saw that, as a wise and good man might be extremely useful, so a foolish and wicked man might do a great deal of injury, to those around him. Hence, contrasting the two, he observed, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.”

In illustrating the latter member of the sentence, we shall point out the truth of it

I. In nations

[Men of all classes in the community may greatly affect the state to which they belong.

A weak and ambitious monarch, how soon may he involve his people in war, and reduce them to the very brink of desolation! Such was Solomon’s only son, who in the space of a few weeks, goaded ten tribes out of the twelve that he ruled over, to revolt from him, and to establish a separate and independent kingdom.^a

An aspiring subject also may, by exaggerating the people’s grievances, and promising them effectual redress, stir up multitudes to insurrection, and involve a nation in all the horrors of civil war. Thus did Absalom:^b and thus have demagogues in every age, in every state.

What immense evil too may not *a cruel persecutor* effect! How may such an one waste the church of God and destroy it! One Jezebel could murder a whole host of prophets;^c and one Saul depopulate the Christian church.^d And, in this nation as well as others, time was, when one cruel bigot kindled fires in every part of the country, to extirpate, if possible, those, who would not return to the justly reprobated errors of her religion.

If a great man be conspicuous for impiety and profaneness; his conduct will be attended with a most baneful influence. Soon will sycophants imitate his example, till irreligion be-

^a 1 Kin. xii. 16.

^c 1 Kin. xviii. 13.

^b 2 Sam. xv. 2—6, 10—14.

^d Acts ix. 1, 2.

comes the fashion of the day, and every thing sacred is trampled under foot. What an awful instance of such success have we in Jeroboam; who, the more effectually to detach from Judah the ten revolted tribes, erected idols in Dan and Bethel, which from that hour became, and ever afterwards remained, the objects of worship through the whole kingdom!^c Hence he is continually stigmatized with the name of “him who made Israel to sin!”^f

But indeed *any enormous sinner*, of whatever class, does much to destroy the peace and prosperity of his country. What is it that arms God against a nation, and provokes him to visit it with war, pestilence, and famine? Is it not sin? Every sinner therefore, in proportion as he increases the nation’s guilt, contributes also to its punishment. In many instances we know, that the whole kingdom of Israel suffered for the offence of one; not for that of David only, who was the monarch;^g but for that also of Achan, an obscure individual;^h nor till the last day will it appear what injury this nation has sustained by *our means.*]

II. In families

[What confusion is brought into any house by *an impetuous husband, a contentious wife, or an undutiful, stubborn child!* Instead of love and harmony, there is little else than brawling and quarrelling; so that the very sight of each other, which ought to call forth all the tender emotions of their hearts, excites nothing but enmity and disgust.

A man addicted to lewdness, gaming, intemperance, evil company, or idleness, to what wretchedness may he soon reduce his family! “God has put a price into the hands of such an one to make his dependants happy, but he knows not how to use it.”ⁱ He might support them in ease and comfort, but brings them to want and desperation. How many instances of this are found in every town and village!

Nor can we easily estimate the good which *a whisperer and tale-bearer* may destroy. Behold, he comes into a house where friends or relatives are cemented in the strictest bonds of union and amity: but he creates suspicion, and alienates their minds, and kindles feuds, and fills with animosity the bosoms that once glowed with mutual affection.^k

But what shall we say of *the vile seducer*, who under the mask of friendship enters the house of his unsuspecting neighbour, and avails himself of the opportunity to decoy his daughter, or to defile his wife? Alas! what incalculable misery

^c Hos. v. 11. In this verse is mentioned not his success only, but the evil it brought upon them. ^d 1 Kin. xxii. 52.

^g 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 15. ^h Josh. xxi. 20. ⁱ Prov. xvii. 16.

^k Prov. xvi. 28

does such a man create! For the sake of a momentary gratification, how many hearts does he pierce with the deepest and most lasting sorrow! What disgrace does he bring upon the whole family, involving the innocent with the guilty in irre-mediable shame, and grief that follows them to the grave! Would to God that, if such a character exist in this assembly, he might be smitten with remorse, and wounded to his inmost soul!]

III. In the church of God

[On whom shall we fix our eyes, as hostile to the church's welfare, so soon as on *the careless minister*? To him God has committed the improvement of sabbaths, of ordinances, of the sacred oracles. To him he has given souls to be nurtured and disciplined for heaven. But the traitor is intent only on his own gains or pleasures: he performs his weekly task, not caring whether any be edified or not: he wastes the precious opportunities, that can never be recalled; and, in the course of his ministry, leads thousands to destruction. Yes; as far as his influence extends, he makes null and void all the purposes of God's grace, and all the wonders of redeeming love. When, humanly speaking, he might have been a blessing to the world, and an ornament to his profession, he brings his sacred function into reproach, scattering the flock whom he should have gathered, and destroying whom he should have saved. Such an one is Satan's best friend, and the greatest enemy of God and man.

Much good also may be destroyed, especially where men are awake to the concerns of religion, by *a proud disputation sectary*. Even though his sentiments be not fundamentally erroneous, yet if he be laying an undue stress on matters that are comparatively indifferent, and forming parties in the church, he distracts the minds of the simple, he puffs up many with pride; he loosens the bonds of brotherly affection, he weakens the hands of a pious minister, and he causes many to relapse into formality and indifference.¹ Of such a character were Hymencus,^m and Alexander:ⁿ and "one such root of bitterness will defile many;"^o on which account we should be as studious as possible to stop their growth.^p

There is scarcely any one in the universe who does greater injury to the church than *the professor who walks dishonourably*. One act of his brings disgrace upon the whole church of God, and makes religion to stink in the very nostrils of those around him.^q Instantly do the ungodly begin to triumph,^r to arraign all the people of God as hypocrites, and to repre-

¹ Rom. xvi. 17, 18. ^m 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17, 18, 23. and iii. 6, 13.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iv. 14, 15. ^o Heb. xii. 15. See also 1 Cor. v. 2, 6. & Gal. v. 7, 9. ^r Tit. i. 13, 14. and iii. 9, 11. ^s Gen. xxxiv. 30.

^v Ps. xxxv. 12, 25.

sent religion itself as a mask for every thing that is vile.¹ Thus the wicked are hardened, the weak are offended, the saints are dishonoured, and the very name of God is blasphemed in the world.² How does God himself complain of this in the case of David!³ and how incalculable must the evil be, when multitudes are thus offended, and set against the very means of salvation!

There is yet one more character that we shall mention, whose conduct indeed is less extensively destructive, but not less injurious to those within his sphere, we mean, *the scoffer*. He brings no disgrace upon religion because he makes no profession of it. Nor can he greatly impede its progress in the world, because he is not invested with authority or influence. But perhaps there is some relation, some friend, whom he can discourage by sneers and ridicule, if not also by menaces and actual unkindness. Suppose then that, in one single instance, he succeed in breaking the bruised reed and quenching the smoaking flax; who shall appreciate the good he has destroyed? to ruin one for whom Christ died; and who, but for such an obstacle, would have got safe to heaven!⁴ If the whole world be of no value in comparison of a soul,⁵ then, in that single act, the scoffer has done more harm than the whole world can recompense.]

APPLICATION

1. Let us all repent of the evil we have done

[Suppose us ever so free from the more flagrant instances that have been mentioned, there is not one amongst us who has not done much evil by means of his example. We have all lived, like the world around us, in a neglect of God and of our own souls: and, in so doing, have countenanced the same conduct in others. Thus, whether we intended it or not, we have confirmed many in their ungodly ways, and have contributed to their eternal ruin. Let us go now, and undo what we have done: alas! we cannot find one half of them: many are not known by us; many are gone to distant parts; many are already in the eternal world: and, if we should attempt to convert those to whom we can get access, they would laugh at us as fools, or despise us as hypocrites. Besides, all of them in their respective spheres have diffused the contagion which they received from us: and thus have put it beyond the reach of man to trace, or even to conceive, the evil we have done. And does not all this call for penitence? Yes; if our “head were a fountain of tears to run down incessantly” to the latest hour of our lives, it would be no more than the occasion calls for.]

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 2.

² Rom. xiv. 15.

³ 1 Tim. vi. 1.

⁴ Matt. xvi. 26.

⁵ 2 Sam. xii. 14.

2. Let us repair the evil to the utmost of our power

[To repair it with respect to God, is the work of Christ only. He alone can render satisfaction for our sins; his blood alone can cleanse us from the guilt we have contracted by them. But with respect to man we may do something, though we cannot do all that we could wish. Let us begin with *our example*: this speaks the most forcibly, and the most extensively. Let us, by giving up ourselves to God, shew others what they ought to do: and let our light so shine before men, that they may be constrained to glorify God, and to take shame to themselves. Next, let us use *our influence*: be it small or great, let us not neglect to exert it, that by every means in our power we may counteract our past evils, and stir up others to flee from the wrath to come. Finally, let us be fervent in *our intercessions* at the throne of grace, that God may take to him his great power, and establish his kingdom upon earth. Let us particularly pray for those, whom, in any respect, we may have allured from the path of duty. Thus, like the great Apostle, we shall make some compensation to the world for all the injuries it has sustained by our means, and shew that, if one sinner can destroy, one saint also can effect, much good.]

**CCCXLVII. THE MEANS OF ASCERTAINING WHO
ARE YET IN A STATE OF NATURE.**

Acts viii. 23. *I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness,
and the bond of iniquity.*

IT is no real disparagement to the gospel of Christ, if some hypocrites be found among the professors of religion—This has been the case in every age of the church, even when the temptations to hypocrisy were far less than they are at present—There was a Judas among the twelve apostles, and a Simon Magus among the converts of Philip—He had appeared sincere in his professions of faith, and therefore Philip had baptized him—He had attached himself with admiration to Philip's ministry,^a and therefore the true Christians regarded him as a brother—But he soon discovered the hypocrisy of his heart, and shewed that, notwithstanding his

^a Ver. 13.

pretensions to conversion and grace, we was still, as much as ever, in a state of nature—Hence Peter addressed him in the words of the text—In discoursing on them we shall enquire

I. What is the state here described?

The various terms here used are not unfrequent in the holy scriptures^b—They import

1. A state of subjection to sin

[Nothing can so justly be termed “gall” as sin—It is indeed the bitterest gall, and the sorest bondage—Men may “roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, but they invariably find it gall in the stomach”—It may please them for a time, but at last “it will bite like a serpent and sting like an adder”—Let those, whose conscience is at all awakened, testify respecting this—Whether we be penitent or not, if our sin have found us out, it will prove a bitter cup—Peter wept bitterly at the remembrance of his guilt; and Judas could not even endure his own existence, when his conscience upbraided him with the act he had committed—And a dreadful vassalage it is to be led captive by sin—No slave in the universe is so much an object of pity, as he who “for a morsel of meat sells his birthright,” and for a momentary gratification consigns his soul over to perdition—]

2. A state of condemnation on account of sin

[This necessarily accompanies the former—There is no freedom from condemnation where there is bondage to sin—Christ came not to save his people *in* their sins, but *from* them—And the certainty of punishment is that, which renders sin so bitter and so formidable—Were there no future account to be given of our actions, the bonds of iniquity would lose their terror—But it is the thought of hell that gives a poignancy to the accusations of conscience, and makes the sinner often wish for utter annihilation—We say not that every sinner feels such anguish of soul (for many are “past feeling, having seared their consciences as with an hot iron”) but we are sure that they would do so if they knew their state, and will do so the very instant they enter into the invisible world—They are therefore in the gall of bitterness because “the wrath of God abideth on them”—]

That this is the lamentable condition of many amongst us will appear, if we enquire

II. Who may evidently be “perceived” to be in that state?

While some are manifestly in a very different state, and

^b Deut. xxix. 18. and xxxii. 32. Heb. vii. 17. Isaiah. lviii. 6.

the condition of others is dubious, there are some who are indisputably in the state just described;

1. They who are yet under the dominion of their former lusts

[Simon had lately been a sorcerer, but upon embracing Christianity had ceased from the practice of his magic arts—Nevertheless his desire of gain and his love of man's applause were altogether unmortified—Hence when a prospect of aggrandizing himself opened to his view, he was ready to return to his former course of life—Nor did he regard what means he used, provided he might but attain his end—And are there not too many amongst ourselves who are yet addicted to their former lusts?—Are not many, who in the days of their ignorance were proud, passionate, unforgiving, still prone to relapse into their former sins the very instant that any temptation occurs?—Are not many as earthly, sensual, and devilish in their tempers and dispositions as ever?—Let them then not deceive themselves—Their state may be easily and clearly “perceived”—It was by such marks that Peter knew beyond a doubt the state of Simon—And by such may the state of every professor in the universe be determined—If they practise, or desire to practise, the same iniquities that they did in their unenlightened state, they are surely “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity”—“Whosoever allowedly committeth sin is most assuredly the servant of sin,” “and the child “of the devil”^c]—]

2. They who pursue religion for carnal ends

[Simon earnestly desired the power of conferring the Holy Ghost—And would have given a sum to obtain it—But from what motive did this spring? Was he desirous of honouring Christ, or of benefiting his fellow-creatures? No: he only desired to advance his own reputation and interest—Alas! how many are there who follow Christ from no better motive!—They hope that by mixing with the society of God's people they shall promote their temporal interests—They wish to be caressed by religious persons, and to be held in reputation for their sanctity and zeal—They do not merely, as even sincere Christian's too often do, feel a mixture of principle within them, which they mourn over and resist; but they act uniformly from selfish motives, and with a view to their own ease, interest or honour—Need we ask the state of such people? It may be too easily “perceived”—Like those who followed Christ for the loaves and fishes, they are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity—]

^c John viii. 34, 44. and I John iii. 8.

3. They who are not attentive to their thoughts as well as their actions

[Many, from the customs of the world, take care to regulate their outward actions, while their thoughts range at liberty and without controul—Simon conceived the thought of purchasing the power of conferring the Holy Ghost; and, instead of mortifying, indulged it—Peter, in his reproof, bade him particularly “pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him;” and perceived by this thought, which he had so unadvisedly divulged, that his “heart was not right in the sight of God, and that he had no part or lot in the gospel salvation”—And may not many amongst ourselves draw the same conclusion from the vain thoughts that lodge within them?—We are well aware that the best of men may have sinful thoughts rushing into their minds—But will they harbour them? No:—Every true Christian may say as in the presence of God, “I hate vain thoughts”—But they, who “regard iniquity in their hearts,” are in a state of desperate delusion—God, who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, “will bring every secret thing into judgment,” and acquit or condemn, according as he sees the prevailing bent of the heart—if then our “thoughts be not so far captivated to the obedience of Christ” that we cherish those that are holy, and mortify all that are corrupt, we may perceive beyond a doubt that we are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity—]

INFER

1. What need is there for the professors of religion to examine their own hearts!

[Simon had been approved by his fellow-creatures, and even by an inspired servant of God—From hence doubtless he would augur well respecting his own state—Yet in the midst of all he only deceived his own soul—What need then have we to examine ourselves!—The approbation of men is but a small matter—it is not he who commendeth himself, or is commended by others, but he whom the Lord commendeth, that shall stand before him with approbation in the last day—Judge yourselves then, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord—Examine not your actions only, but your *desires*, your *motives*, and your *thoughts*—By these will God determine your state in the last day—Nor shall any but the upright in heart be accepted of him—]

2. What reason have true Christians to rejoice!

[The declaration made to Simon intimated that no true Christian was in his state—Blessed thought! If we really be-

lieve in Jesus, and experience the purifying efficacy of that faith, we have nothing to fear—The bonds of sin are broken asunder—Nor shall one drop of the cup of bitterness be ever tasted by us to all eternity—Rejoice, believer, in thy deliverer—Thou once wast in the state of Simon, a miserable, enslaved, condemned sinner—But now “the Son hath made thee free, and thou art free indeed”—“There is no condemnation to thee since thou art in Christ Jesus”—Rejoice evermore—But endeavour still to maintain a guard over thy words and thoughts—“Seek not great things for thyself,” nor “the honour that cometh of man”—Be more solicitous about graces than about gifts—And whatever God hath bestowed on thee, labour to improve it, not for thine own glory, but for the good of men and the glory of God—Thus shall it be evidently “perceived” that thou art in the way of peace—And thou shalt receive the plaudit of thy Lord himself in the day of judgment—]

CCCXLVIII. THE WICKEDNESS, MADNESS, AND MISERY OF UNREGENERATE MEN.

Eccl. ix. 3. The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness is in their heart while they live; and after that, they go to the dead.

IF we look only on the surface of things, we shall think that all things come alike to all, since all are subject to the same afflictions, and go down to the grave in their appointed season. But the righteous, however afflicted, “are in the hands of God,”^a who ordereth and overruleth every thing for their good; whereas the wicked, however prosperous, are left to run their career of sin, till they fall into the pit of everlasting destruction. The state and end of unregenerate men are awfully declared in the words before us; wherein is depicted

I. Their wickedness

[“The hearts of unregenerate men are full of evil.” Every species of filthiness, whether fleshy or spiritual,^b abounds within them^c—They have not a faculty either of body or soul that is not defiled with sin^d—So full of iniquity are they, that there is no good within them^e—And this is the state, not of

^a Ver. 1.

^b 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^c Rom. i. 29—31.

^d Rom. iii. 10—18.

^e Gen. vi. 5. Rom. vii. 18.

a few only, but of every child of man, till he has been renewed by the Holy Spirit—]

II. Their madness

[It may well be expected that creatures so depraved should manifest their depravity in the whole of their conduct. And in truth they do: for they are even mad. *They pour contempt upon the greatest good.* Can any thing be compared with the salvation of the soul? And do they not disregard this? And is not such conduct madness? *They also disregard the greatest of all evils,* the wrath of God—And would not this be madness, if there were only a bare possibility of their falling under his everlasting displeasure?—How much more then, when it is as certain, as that there is a God!—Moreover, *they continue in this state,* for the most part, “*as long as they live.*” If they acted only through ignorance, or were drawn aside for a little time by temptation, or if they turned from this way, as soon as they came to the full exercise of their reason, yea, if they rectified their conduct as soon as their own consciences condemned it, they would have some shadow of an excuse. But, when they persist, against light and knowledge, against warnings and judgments, yea, against their own vows and resolutions, what is it but madness itself? Let a man act in such a way with respect to *the things of this world,* and no one will hesitate a moment to pronounce him mad.^g]

III. Their misery

[How pleasant soever the ways of ungodly men appear, they will soon terminate in death^h—But the righteous also must go to the grave: no doubt therefore it is another death that is here spoken of, even “*the second death, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.*” This is affirmed by God in the strongest mannerⁱ—And, however disbelieved by those whom it most concerns, it shall assuredly be found true at the last. Yea, we have even now the consciences of men attesting this awful truth: and if we should say, that the ungodly, after such a life, should “*go to heaven,* instead of to “*the dead,*” though they might be wicked enough to wish it, they would not be mad enough to believe it. They have a presentiment, in spite of all their reasonings to the contrary, that “*their end shall be according to their works*”^k—]

INFER

I. How necessary is it to deal faithfully with the souls of men!

^f John iii. 6. Tit. iii. 3. Jer. xvii. 9.

^g Luke xv. 17.

^h Job, xx. 5—9. ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 9. Ps. ix. 17. ^k 2 Cor. xi. 15.

[Should we "prophesy smooth things" unto people who are perishing in their sins, and who before another sabbath may be "gone to the dead?" Should we, if we beheld a stranded vessel, seek to amuse the sailors, instead of affording them direction and assistance? How much less then if we ourselves were embarked with them, and were partners of their danger? Surely then every time we preach, we should bear in mind that both our hearers and ourselves are dying creatures, and that, if we forbear to warn them, we ruin ourselves for ever.^{1]}]

2. How earnestly should every one seek to be born again!

[Does the notion of regeneration appear absurd?^m Let all hear and understand the grounds of that doctrine. What must we think of God, if he should fill heaven with sinners incorrigibly wicked, and incurably mad? Or what happiness could such sinners find in heaven, even if they were admitted there? There must be a meetness for the heavenly state:ⁿ and that meetness can be obtained only by means of the new birth.^o A new heart must be given us,^p and we must be made "new creatures in Christ Jesus."^q Let all then seek this renewal of their hearts;^r for, unless they be born again, they shall never enter into God's kingdom.^s]

3. How greatly are all regenerate persons indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ!

[They were once even as others: if there was any difference, it was only in their *acts*, and not in their *hearts*.^t But they are delivered from their sins,^u endued with soundness of mind,^x and made heirs of everlasting life:^y and all this they have received through the atoning blood and prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus. What a Benefactor then is HE! And how should the hearts of all be knit to him in love! O "let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed:"^z and let all seek these blessings at the hands of a gracious and almighty Saviour.]

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 8.

^m John iii. 7, 9.

ⁿ Col. i. 12.

^o John iii. 5, 6.

^p Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

^q 2 Cor. v. 17.

^r Eph. iv. 22—24.

^s John iii. 3.

^t Eph. ii. 3.

^u Rom. vi. 14. & viii. 2.

^x 2 Tim. i. 7.

^y John v. 24.

^z Ps. cvii. 1, 2.

CCCXLIX. MEN'S PROUD CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Psalm x. 4, 5. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts: his ways are always grievous: thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.

PRIDE, when manifested in a flagrant manner, universally excites disgust; so hateful is it, when divested of the specious garb in which it is generally clothed. But though all hate pride, when it appears in others, few are sensible how much it reigns within their own bosoms. In our converse with man, this evil disposition is ready to shew itself on every occasion: but in our conduct towards God, it is the fruitful parent of habitual neglect, and atheistical contempt. This is affirmed in the passage before us, in which we may notice

I. The state of the wicked

It is not easy to conceive a more humiliating description of their character than that given us by the Psalmist:

They “will not seek after God.”

[God invites them to seek his face, and promises that he will be found of them; but they cannot be prevailed upon either by promises or threats: they will seek with eagerness an earthly object, that may make them happy; but they account God unworthy of any notice or regard.^a]

“He is not even admitted into their thoughts”

[It is astonishing to what a degree men often banish God from their minds. They will pass days, months, and even years without one reverential thought of him, unless when they are alarmed by some awful providence, or awakened by some faithful discourse: and then, unless the grace of God prevent them, they will cast him out of their minds again as soon as possible, and drown their thoughts in business or dissipation.^b]

They account “his ways,” as far as they know them, “grievous”

[When urged to devote themselves to God in sincerity

^a Job. xxxv. 10.

^b Job. xxi. 14. 15.

and truth, they conceive that such a state is unattainable, or, at least, incompatible with the common duties and offices of life. They call the indulgence of their lusts, liberty; and the exercise of vital godliness, an intolerable bondage. Every part of the divine life is irksome to them, and *that* too, not occasionally, but "always," without any change or intermission.]

The "judgments of God are far above out of their sight"

[By the "judgments" of God we understand his word and works. Now these are not only out of their sight in some particulars (for they are incomprehensible in some respects even to the most enlightened saints) but they are altogether foolishness unto them.^c When the mysteries of redemption are opened, they are esteemed by them as "cunningly devised fables;" and when the marvellous interpositions of Providence are insisted on, they are ready to exclaim, with Ezekiel's hearers, "Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables?"^d]

"As for all their enemies, they puff at them"

[If God himself threaten them as an enemy, they disregard his menaces. The denunciations of his wrath are deemed by them unworthy of any serious attention. They even puff at them with contempt and disdain. They quiet all their fears, saying, like them of old, "Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it."^e "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart."^f]

In order to account for this state of things, let us trace it to

II. The real source of their wickedness

We might trace this practical atheism to men's ignorance and unbelief: but the Psalmist suggests to us the true ground and occasion of it: it all arises from the pride of their hearts.

Men are *too good*, in their own apprehension, *to need God's mercy*

[They will confess that they are not altogether so good as they might be; but they do not think they deserve God's wrath and indignation. Why then should they trouble themselves to ask for mercy at his hands, when they are in no danger of suffering his judgments?^g]

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Ezek. xx. 49.

^e Ps. xciv. 7.

^f Deut. xxix. 19.

They are also too strong to need his aid

[They imagine, that they can repent when they please, and that, whenever they resolve, they can easily carry their resolutions into effect. If they thought that "without God they could do nothing," and that "he must give them both to will and to do," then there were reason for imploring his assistance: but, when they acknowledge no such dependence upon God, wherefore should they seek his aid?]

Moreover, they are too wise to need the teachings of his Spirit

[They see perhaps their need of a revelation to discover to them the mind and will of God; but, when that is once given, they are not conscious, that they need a spiritual illumination to discover the truths contained in it. They suppose their reason to be as sufficient for the investigation of spiritual, as of carnal things: and under that persuasion, they consider all application to God for the teachings of his Spirit, as enthusiastic and absurd.]

Finally, they are too happy to need the divine presence

[They are occupied with carnal pleasure, and wish for nothing beyond it. If only they can have the undisturbed indulgence of their appetites, it is, to them, all the paradise they desire. As for the light of God's countenance, and the manifestations of his love, they know not what is meant by such things; they suppose that they exist only in the pretensions of hypocrites, and the conceits of fanatics.

In short, like those of Laodicea, they possess such an imaginary sufficiency within themselves, that they have no need of God at all.^g And hence it is that they care not to have God in all their thoughts.]

INFER

1. How astonishing is the depravity of human nature!

[If all be not equally addicted to gross sins, all are equally "without God in the world."^h all have a "carnal mind that is enmity against God."ⁱ Alas! What a picture of human nature! Let "every mouth then be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God."^k]

2. How great is the change that takes place in conversion!

[The state of a converted soul forms a perfect contrast with that of the wicked. "Old things pass away, and all things become new." Let all then ask themselves, Am I now devoting myself to God, as once I did to the world; and de-

^g Rev. iii. 17.

^h Eph. ii. 12.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 7.

^k Rom. iii. 10, 11, 12, 19.

spising the world, as once I despised God? This were indeed “a new creation.”]

3. How necessary is conversion in order to an enjoyment of heaven!

[There must be within ourselves a meetness for heaven before we can enjoy it.^m Let not those then, who banish God from their thoughts, and cast off his yoke, suppose that they could be happy in heaven, even if they were admitted there. If they would delight themselves in God for ever, they must obtain in this world a conformity to his image, and a delight in his commandments.]

12 Cor. v. 17.

^m Col. i. 12.

CCCL. THE MUTUAL ABHORRENCE BETWEEN GOD AND SINNERS.

Zecl. xi. 8. My soul loathed them; and their soul abhorred me.

THE judgments of God that from time to time are inflicted on mankind are standing proofs that man has offended his Maker, and that God is displeased with his creatures. In this view they are continually represented in the scriptures; and in this light the Prophet taught his hearers to consider them. God had determined to abolish that covenant which he had made with his people, and to destroy the Jewish polity, the sacred part of which he called “Beauty,” and the civil “Bands.” He speaks of himself as having already cut off (or perhaps, in prophetic language, as determined to cut off) three shepherds, the princes, the prophets, and the priests, in one month; and assigns as a reason for it, that there was a mutual abhorrence between himself and them; and that consequently there was abundant reason for the judgments denounced against them.

The Prophet, throughout this chapter, personates the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom a part of it was very remarkably fulfilled, and to whom it is expressly applied in the New Testament.^a But it is simply to

^a Ver. 11, 12. with Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.

the words before us that we would now draw your attention: and we will take occasion from them to shew

I. What a deep-rooted enmity subsists between God and sinners

View it, where it first commenced

1. On man's part

[Ungodly men neither seek to please God,^b nor are at all grieved at having displeased him^c—They like not to speak, hear, or even think of him^d—They cannot endure (a melancholy proof of their aversion to him!) to be with him *alone*^e—They hate every thing in proportion as it exhibits God to them, or would lead them to God^f—They even wish there were no God^g—Yea, when God actually put himself into their power, they sold him at the price of a slave, and crucified and slew him^h—

What abundant proof is here, that “the carnal mind is enmity with God!”ⁱ And what an evidence of that abhorrence in which, according to the scriptures, our adorable Saviour was to be held!^k]

2. On God's part

[Towards *penitent* sinners (as we shall have occasion to shew) God is reconciled: but, while they continue obstinate in their sins, he “loathes them,” nor can even look upon them without the utmost abhorrence.^l He will not vouchsafe them the smallest taste of those blessings which he imparts to others in the richest abundance^m—He gives them up into the hands of their greatest enemies, to Satan and their own hearts lustersⁿ—He prepares his instruments of vengeance against the time when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquities^o—He even comforts himself with the pro-

^b Job xxxv. 10. ^c Jer. viii. 6. ^d Ps. x. 4.

^e As men can meet their bitterest enemy in a crowd, but would be uneasy to be left alone with him; so the ungodly can meet God in his house, but cannot bear to commune with him in their secret chamber.

^f Hence faithful ministers, and godly people, and searching discourses, yea, and the Bible itself, are neglected and despised.

^g Ps. xiv. 1. This is a *wish*. The words, “there is,” are not in the original.

^h See note ^a. ⁱ Rom. viii. 7. ^k Isai. xl ix. 7. ^l Hab. i. 13.

^m Compare Ps. cxix. 165. with Isai. lvii. 21. and 1 Pet. i. 8. with Prov. xiv. 10.

ⁿ 2 Tim. ii. 26. Ps. lxxxi. 12. Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

^o Ps. vii. 12, 13. Deut. xxxii. 19, 20, 35, 41, 42. He even kindles with his own breath the fire that is to consume them, Isai. xxx. ult.

spect of pouring out his wrath upon them to the uttermost.^p—

What awful evidences are these of the truth in question! what proofs that he even lothes and abhors all the workers of iniquity^q—]

But, notwithstanding this mutual enmity, the gospel shews us

II. How it may be turned into mutual love

There is, in truth, but one way in which reconciliation can be effected between God and sinners. Yet we may not unprofitably divide it into two heads

1. Repentance towards God

[This can never purchase our peace with God; yet is it absolutely necessary to prepare our minds for the reception of his favour. And wherever it manifests itself in deed and in truth, God will instantly put away his anger, and embrace the sinner in the arms of his mercy———]

2. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ

[It is this which unites us unto Christ, and gives us an interest in all that he has done and suffered on our behalf. If his hand were stretched forth, to plunge his sword into our very bosom, the very first act of faith should make it fall from his hands, and induce him to return it instantly to its scabbard^s———Nor would he from that moment account any expression of his love too great for us^t———]

Nor is God only reconciled to us by these means, but we also are reconciled to him.

[It is in this view that the scriptures most generally represent our return to God.^u And it is certain that from the very instant we repent and believe in Christ, our enmity against God is slain, and we delight in him as much as ever we once abhorred him. We love to hear and think and speak of him, and to maintain the closest fellowship with him: we love all who love him, and *that* too in proportion as they resemble him: and every thing that can discover him to us, or draw us nearer unto him, is on that very account unspeakably precious to our souls—As for the Saviour, who was sold for the price of the meanest slave, and who was once altogether despised by us, his name is music in our ears; and the whole world is as dung in comparison of him^x—]

^p Isai. i. 24. Ezek. xxi. 15. and v. 13. ^q Ps. v. 5. and x. 3.

^r Jer. iii. 13. Isaiah iv. 7. Ps. li. 17. Luke xv. 20. Jer. xxxi. 20.

^s John iii. 16. and vi. 37. Acts iii. 39. Isaiah i. 18. Acts xvi. 30.

^t Jer. xxxii. 41. Zeph. iii. 17. ^u 2 Cor. v. 18, 20. Col. i. 21.

^v Phil. iii. 8.

We subjoin a word

1. Of caution

[We may suppose that, because our enmity against God is the ground and reason of his aversion to us, our love to him is the ground and reason of his love to us. No: if we love him, it is because he first loved us.^y Were it not that he of his own mere mercy vouchsafed to send us his grace, we never should have our enmity to him in the smallest degree abated. We must therefore take nothing but shame to ourselves; and give nothing but glory unto him. We must confess that our hatred of him was altogether without a cause;^z whereas his aversion to us was just and merited. On the other hand, his love to us is free and sovereign; whereas ours is the tardy, forced, and disproportioned fruit of his victorious grace.]

2. Of encouragement

[“The wicked man is loathsome:^a but how loathsome soever he be, he need not fear but that God is ready to receive him in the arms of mercy^b—Let this be contemplated by all, till a lively hope is begotten in their hearts, and they are constrained to say, I will no more “abhor the Holy One, and the Just,”^c but will turn to him with my whole heart.]

^y 1 John iv. 19.

^z John xv. 25.

^a Prov. xiii. 5.

^b If instead of continuing the contest we apply to God through Christ, our peace with him shall soon be made. Isaiah xxvii. 4, 5.

^c Acts iii. 14.

CCCLI. THE DANGER OF DISREGARDING THE WORD OF GOD.

Exod. ix. 20, 21. *He that feared the word of the Lord amongst the servants of Pharaoh, made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: and he that regarded not the word of the Lord, left his servants and his cattle in the field.*

THE word of God in every age has met with a very different reception from different people; from the antediluvian scoffers to the present moment, the generality have deemed it unworthy of their attention, while a few have regarded it with reverence and godly fear—Never had any declaration a better title to belief than that to which the text alludes: Moses had already, in the space of a few days, foretold many judgments, which were in-

stantly inflicted or removed according to his predictions; and since they had not been effectual to subdue the stubborn heart of Pharaoh, he announced the determination of God to send another judgment on the land of Egypt, even a storm of hail and lightning, which should destroy every man and beast that should be exposed to its fury—There were many however who despised the threatening, and disdained to send their servants and cattle to a place of shelter; but others, who had profited by past experience, used with eagerness the precaution suggested to them—

From this circumstance we are led to observe that
I. It will appear from men's conduct what regard they
pay to the word of God

In all temporal concerns men are affected by any report in proportion to its credibility and importance

[If they hear of any great *good* that is placed within their reach, they feel a desire after it springing up in their minds: if there be some considerable probability of their attaining it, their hopes are excited, and their endeavours multiplied in order to secure it—if the possession of it appear near and certain; they already congratulate themselves on the expected acquisition, though not without a mixture of anxious suspense—On the other hand, do they hear of any great *evil* that may come upon them? they begin to be disquieted: does it approach nearer and nearer? they think how they may avoid it, and use every precaution that prudence can suggest: does it appear imminent and almost unavoidable? their fears and anxieties are proportionably increased—Nor are these effects peculiar to any times, places, or persons: they will be found on examination to be invariable and universal—]

Thus it must also of necessity be with respect to spiritual concerns in proportion as they are believed and felt

[Suppose a person to be thoroughly persuaded that, “except he repent he must perish;” that, “except he be born again of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;” and that, “he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life;” what effect must such momentous truths produce upon his mind? Must he not of necessity begin to enquire into the meaning of these expressions, and feel a solicitude to determine these questions, Am I a real penitent? Am I born again? Have I the Son of God?—If other things appear to him of superior importance,

he will attend to other things in preference: or if he doubt the truth of these things, and think they may be taken in a lower sense, he will of course be less concerned to attain the experience of them—But let him have that faith which gives a present subsistence to things future, and a demonstrable reality to things invisible,^a and it will be impossible for him to trifle with such solemn declarations—It is true, he may sin against the convictions of conscience; but if he continue so to do, it is evident that his convictions are not proportioned in any degree to the importance of eternal things, and that he cherishes a secret hope of escaping by some means or other the judgments denounced against him. Let him but *feel* the worth of his soul *in a degree proportioned to its value*, as much as men estimate the worth of their cattle or their natural life according to their value, and he could no more resist *habitually* the convictions of his mind, than he could sit composed, while his house and family were ready to be destroyed by fire: he would surely resemble those Egyptians who sought shelter for their servants and cattle; he would “flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life”—]

Such a practical attention will be given to the word of God by all who truly believe it, because they know that

II. According as they regard it now, will be their state in the world to come

The distinction put between the believing and unbelieving Egyptians related merely to this present life: but the scriptures authorize us to declare that a similar distinction will be made between believers and unbelievers in the day of judgment

1. They who have sought the appointed refuge shall be saved

[Christ is that hiding-place to which all are enjoined to flee: every other covert will be found “a refuge of lies, which the hail shall sweep away:”^b but Christ is a sure refuge, “to which whosoever runneth shall be safe”—Whatever we may have been, and whatever we may have done, in past times, we have nothing to apprehend from the wrath of God, provided we be “found in Christ”—“Believing in him, we are justified from all things,” and shall unite for ever with the murderous Manasseh, the adulterous David, the filthy Magdalen, and the persecuting Saul, in singing “salvation to God and the Lamb”—We must not however be understood to say, that the attention to the faith of the gospel will save us, while we neglect

^a Heb. xi. 1. in the Greek.

^b Isaiah xxviii. 17.

its practical injunctions; but that, the vilest of sinners may find “acceptance in the Beloved,” and that “all who put their trust in him may be quiet from the fear of evil”—The declaration of God himself is, “There is no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*”]

2. They, on the contrary, who have despised the offers of mercy, will perish

[“Whatsoever men sow, that shall they also reap:” and though God’s vengeance may be long delayed, yet it shall come at last—There was no appearance of a deluge when Noah warned the old world; nor were the fire and brimstone visible, when Lot intreated his sons in law to escape with him from Sodom; yet the predictions relative to these events were exactly fulfilled; he who built the ark, and he who fled from the devoted city, were preserved; while they who took not warning, were destroyed—So also shall it be in the last day: “the unbelief of men shall not make the faith of God of none effect”—“Their covenant with death shall be disannulled, and their agreement with hell made void: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, they shall be beaten down by it”^c—Nor shall the excuses, which they now urge with so much confidence, avail them—It is probable that many of the Egyptians might expose themselves to danger in consequence of *urgent business*, or from what they judged, a *necessary obedience to the commands of their masters*; but they perished notwithstanding—So shall that word be verified in spite of all excuses, “Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment, shall be rewarded”^d]

ADDRESS

1. Those that disregard the word of the Lord

[There are, alas! too many who “stumble at the word, being disobedient:” their language is, “As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee:”^e—If they do not openly deny the scriptures, they shew by their conduct that they consider its doctrines as fanatical, its precepts as harsh, its promises as illusory, and its threatenings as vain—But, while “they thus reject the word of the Lord, what wisdom is in them?”^f—Doubtless if they who were in the midst of the storm saw any of their neighbours housed, they would cast a wishful look at them: and will not their lot be envied in the last day, who shall have taken refuge in Christ, and found protection from the wrath of God?—Let then the remembrance of them operate powerfully on our hearts—Let us “search the scriptures, and make

^c Isaiah xxviii. 18.

^d Prov. xiii. 13.

^e Jer. xliiv. 16.

^f Jer. viii. 9.

them our meditation day and night"—Let us take them "as a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths"—Let us "treasure them up in our hearts," and labour to follow the directions which they give us—Let us "receive the word with meekness, "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God"—Let us beg of God that it may be "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to our inmost souls, and discovering to us the very thoughts and intents of our hearts"—So will God look upon us with favourable acceptance,^g and acknowledge us as "his in the day that he shall make up his jewels"^h]—

2. Those who fear the word of the Lord

[Some there are we trust, who having once, like good Josiah, wept on account of the denunciations of God's wrath, now find his word sweeter to them "than honey and the honey-comb," and, like Job, "esteem it more than their necessary food"—There is not a threatening in it which they dare to despise, or a promise which they do not desire to enjoy, or a precept which they do not labour to obey. They desire nothing so much as to be "cast into the mould of the gospel," and to be "sanctified by means of it in body, soul, and spirit"—Happy then are ye; for if ye "tremble at the word" of God, ye have no reason to tremble at any thing else—Ye may look at death with complacency, and at hell itself without terror, since ye are screened under the shadow of your Redeemer's wings—Envy not then the liberty, and the thoughtlessness of sinners, neither let their revilings deter you from your purpose—The time is quickly coming when your God will appear to their shame and to your joy—Then the wisdom of your conduct will be seen in its true colours: and you shall understand the full import of that question, "Doth not my word do good to him that walketh uprightly?"ⁱ]—

^g Isaiah lxv. 2. ^h Mal. iii. 15. ⁱ Isaiah lxv. 5. ^k Mic. ii. 7.

CCCLII. THE SINFULNESS OF CONFOUNDING GOOD AND EVIL.

Isaiah v. 20. *Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.*

THAT man in his present state is a corrupt and sinful creature, is too plain to be denied: the whole tenor of his conduct proves it beyond a doubt. But the generality give themselves credit for meaning well at the very

time that they are doing ill. In this, however, they are mistaken. There is in all a far greater consciousness of the evil of their conduct than they are willing to allow. But they wish to quiet their own minds, and to approve themselves to the world: and therefore they change the names of things, “calling good, evil, and evil good, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.” By these means they succeed in allaying their own fears, and in commending themselves to each other; but their guilt before God is increased: for our Lord says, “*This is the condemnation*, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” There is in their hearts a rooted aversion to what is good, and a consequent determination to decry it: there is also an inveterate love of evil, and a consequent desire to justify it. Hence arises that conduct which is so justly reprobated in the text; the *prevalence* and *evil* of which we shall proceed to lay before you.

I. We will endeavour to point out the prevalence of this conduct.

The more we examine the principles and actions of men, the more shall we find that this system obtains among them both in *theory* and *practice*.

Inspect their views of religion; and it will appear that they consider it as a *superficial* thing, consisting in a bare assent to certain notions, and a formal observance of certain rites. If they have been baptized in their infancy; if they have some general views of Christianity together with a persuasion of its divine authority; if they attend regularly on public worship, and occasionally communicate at the Lord’s supper; and finally, if they are not guilty of any gross and scandalous violations of their duty, they think they have all the religion that they need.

But they substitute the shadow for the substance. Religion is widely different from this: it is a conversion of the soul to God: it is a resurrection from the dead: it is a new creation. Religion, as it exists in the soul, is a heaven-born principle, that pervades all its powers, and operates in all its faculties. It is to the soul what the soul is to the body. It limits our passions, corrects our

appetites purifies our affections. It enters into all our motives, and subjects every thing to itself. It will endure no rival: it will make a truce with no enemy: it will reign absolute over the whole man. Its avowed object is to bring man to God as a redeemed sinner, and to restore him to a meetness for that inheritance which he has forfeited by his transgressions: in order to accomplish this, it casts down every high and towering imagination, brings its votary to the foot of the cross, constrains him to walk in the steps of his divine Master, and progressively transforms him into the image of his God.

Compare this with the slight and worthless thing which men in general call religion, and it will appear that they use the term without any just apprehension of its true import.

Again; as religion is esteemed a superficial thing, so it is also deemed a *melancholy* thing. When true religion is described, the generality of men are ready to exclaim against it as incompatible with social happiness. "If we must repent of our past sins, and enter on a course of mortification and self-denial; if we must renounce the pleasures of sin, and the society of the ungodly; if we must converse familiarly with death and judgment, and spend our lives in preparation for eternity; what remains for us in this world but gloom and melancholy?" So *they* think.

But is this the light in which the scriptures speak of religion? or are these notions justified by experience? We allow the premises to be correct; but is the conclusion just? Suppose for a moment that the whole life of a person who appeared religious, were a scene of melancholy: must that melancholy be imputed to religion? Must it not rather be imputed to his former wickedness, and to his present want of more religion? If pain arise to the body during the cure of an inveterate disorder, is that pain to be imputed to the medicine, or the disease? to the disease, no doubt: to that therefore must be ascribed all the pain of sorrow and contrition, even supposing it to be ever so great, and ever so long continued. As for religion itself, we need only ascertain what it is, and we shall immediately see the absurdity of calling it a source of misery. What! is it melancholy to walk with God, to

enjoy God, to glorify God? Was our Lord melancholy? Were his apostles melancholy? Are the angels in heaven melancholy? Then shall we be melancholy in proportion as we resemble them. But if “the ways of religion be ways of pleasantness and peace,” and they who believe in Christ be privileged to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified,” then are they perverse who deem religion melancholy, “they call evil good, and good evil, they put darkness for light, and light for darkness, they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.”

To complete their perverseness, men go farther still, and actually represent religion as *contemptible*. What is there under the sun more despised than this? With what opprobrium has it not been stigmatized? We appeal to all, whether terms of reproach are not universally assigned to religious characters, and whether the name given them do not universally convey the idea of a weak, contemptible enthusiast? Is not their very profession considered as a just bar to their preferment? Yea, are they not so odious in the eyes of the world, that none but those infected with their mania will venture to associate with them, or to acknowledge them as their friends? The drunkard, the whoremonger, the sabbath-breaker, the infidel, shall find a more favourable reception than they; and *solely on account of their religion*.

But does religion deserve this character? What is there in it that is so contemptible? What is there in it that to an impartial judge would not appear lovely, great, and venerable? Is the subjugation of the passions a contemptible attainment? Is a superiority to all the pleasures of sense, and the interests of the world, a worthless acquisition? Is there any thing mean in love to God, and benevolence to man? Is the aspiring after heaven a low and pitiful ambition? Viewing at a distance the conduct of the apostles, we call it magnanimity: but when we see it exhibited before our eyes, we call it preciseness, enthusiasm, hypocrisy. Ah! when will men “cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord,” and to brand that with infamy, which he prescribes and approves?

Hitherto we have noticed only men's conduct in respect of theory; let us now behold it as it is manifest in their *practice*.

In the first place they *magnify* beyond all reasonable bounds *the pursuits of time*. From our earliest infancy we hear of little but getting forward in the world. To be rich, to be great, to be honourable, this is the chief good of man. All are aspiring after a higher place than they possess, and conceive that they shall catch the phantom of happiness when they have reached a certain point. Moreover, all are applauded in proportion as they succeed in this race; and no period but that of their departure from the body is thought a fit season for prosecuting their eternal interests.

But are the concerns of time really of such importance? When we have got forward in the world, what have we more than food and raiment, which we might have possessed with half the trouble? We do not mean to discourage industry; *that* is truly becoming in every person, and highly advantageous in every state. But if all our time and labour be occupied about this world, and the concerns of the soul be subordinated to those of the body, then is our conduct precisely such as is reprobated in the text.

In the next place, men *extenuate sin as venial*. There are some crimes which degrade human nature, or greatly disturb the happiness of society, which are therefore reprobated and abhorred. But a forgetfulness of God, a neglect of Christ, a resistance of the Holy Ghost, an indifference about the soul, with ten thousand other sins of omission or of commission, are considered as light and venial, and as affording no ground for sorrow and contrition. If the outward conduct have been decent, it is no matter what has been harboured within, or how much God has been disregarded and despised.

But is this the light in which the scriptures teach us to regard sin? What was it that cast angels out of heaven? the sin of pride. What drove our first parents from Paradise, and brought a curse on all their posterity? one single transgression; and *that* a breach, not so much of a moral precept, as of a positive institution. Whom is it

that according to God's declaration he will cast into hell? "the wicked, and all the nations that forget God." Does sin appear a light matter when we are told, that nothing but the sacrifice of the Son of God could make atonement for it? Or will it appear a light matter to ourselves, when we are suffering the vengeance due to it in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone? Surely, they are "fools who make a mock at sin," and blind, who doubt of its malignity.

To adduce only one instance more, they *persuade themselves that their eternal state is safe*. Men living in a direct violation of God's commandments, and in a perfect contrast with the example of Christ, imagine that they have nothing to fear: "they have done no harm; and God is very merciful; and if they were to perish, what must become of all the world?" These, and such like arguments, are considered as sufficient to invalidate every word that God has spoken, and to justify their hopes of eternal happiness.

But darkness and light are not more opposite than these sentiments are to the declarations of God. Where will they find one single passage that will warrant such expectations as these? They must indeed *make "evil good, and good evil, and must change bitter to sweet, and sweet bitter,"* before they can have the smallest ground of hope in such a state as theirs.

We might easily prosecute this subject in a great variety of views: but enough has been spoken to elucidate the words before us: and we trust that no doubt can remain upon your minds, but that all who consider religion as *superficial, melancholy, or contemptible*, together with all who *magnify the pursuits of time, and extenuate sin as venial*, and at the same time *persuade themselves that their eternal state is safe*, are indeed obnoxious to the censure in the text.

We shall pass on therefore to shew
Secondly, The evil of their conduct.

But where shall we find words sufficient to declare its great enormity? It is in the first place, *a contemptuous rejection of God's truth*.

God has clearly marked the difference between good and evil in his word: and if the eyes of our understanding be not blinded by prejudice or passion, we may discern it as easily as we can discern by our bodily senses, light from darkness, or sweet from bitter. But when an appeal is made to the sacred records, their testimony is considered as of no account. Who has not seen the contempt with which God's word is treated, when it is brought forward to oppose some fashionable practice, some favourite lust? One would suppose that its import should be candidly examined, and carefully ascertained. One might expect that they who heard it, should act like mariners sailing by the compass; that they would endeavour to proceed, as much as possible, in the right direction; that they would deliberate, if at any time they had reason to think that they were out of their proper course; that they would be thankful for any information that might tend to rectify their mistakes: above all, they would not madly steer in direct opposition to the compass, and at the same time discard all doubts about their safe arrival at the place of their destination: *that* were a folly of which no man in his senses is capable. Yet this is the very manner in which men act with respect to the scriptures. There is no other directory than that; and yet they will not only not follow it, but will go on in wilful opposition to it, and still affirm that they are in the way to heaven. Do we speak too harshly of this conduct if we call it a contempt of God's truth? It is the very expression used by our Lord himself, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me." Indeed, the inspired writers speak in yet severer terms: they do not hesitate to affirm, that whosoever acts thus, makes God a liar; "he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar." What horrible iniquity is this! If an avowed infidel disregard the admonitions of scripture, he acts consistently, because he does not acknowledge them to be of divine authority. But if *we* despise them, *we* who profess to regard them as inspired of God, *we* who expect to be judged according to them in the last day, what can be said in extenuation of

our guilt? Even “ Sodom and Gomorrah may well rise up in judgment against us.”

2. In the next place their conduct is a *wilful deluding of those around them*. Every man, whether he design it or not, has a considerable influence on his friends and neighbours. The rich and learned in particular, and more especially they who minister in holy things, are looked up to as examples; and their conduct is pleaded both as a precedent, and as a justification of those who follow it. “ Can such learned men be deceived? Can they who have entered into the service of the sanctuary, and solemnly undertaken to guide us in the way of peace, can *they* be wrong? Can they be “ blind, who are leaders of the blind?” If then they, who from their education, their office and profession, ought to understand the scriptures better than we, if *they* do not approve, either in theory or practice, the things which appear to be enjoined in the Bible, doubtless they have good reasons for their conduct: they would not proceed in a way which they knew to be wrong; we therefore may safely follow them.”

By this mode of arguing, all persons lull themselves asleep in their evil ways. Every one upholds his neighbour in the sentiments he has embraced, and in the path he has marked out for himself: and all, instead of condemning themselves for not obeying the divine commands, unite in condemning the obedient as needlessly singular and precise.

Now we cannot but know that, though an individual has not this extensive influence, the collective body of individuals has; and that every member of society contributes his share according to the conspicuousness of his station, and the sanctity of his profession. Yet we persist in calling good evil, notwithstanding we know that, by so doing we encourage others to do the same. And is this no aggravation of our guilt? Are we not responsible to God for stirring up, according to our ability, an universal rebellion against him; and for contributing thus to the eternal condemnation, not of those only with whom we associate, but of thousands also whom we have not known?

Doubtless Jeroboam contracted peculiar guilt in “establishing iniquity by a law;” but did not exceeding great guilt attach also to those, who “willingly ran after his commandment?” Did not every one of them countenance idolatry, and render an adherence to the true God more difficult? They however might plead obedience to an established law: but there is no law, except the imperious law of fashion, to mislead *us*; and *that* we establish, while we follow it: we bind others, while we ourselves yield obedience to it. Woud to God that men could consider their conduct in this view, as discouraging, and perhaps turning aside, the weak; as rendering odious the godly; and as hardening the wicked! Surely they would not then say, What harm have I done? but would be ready to confess themselves the very chief of sinners.

3. Lastly, the confounding of good and evil is *an awful trifling with our eternal state*. We profess to believe that there is “a day appointed of God, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;” and that “every one of us shall stand at the judgment-seat of Christ to receive according to the things done in the body, whether they have been good or evil.” Now in that day we shall not be judged by the opinions of men, but by the word of God. It will be no excuse to any one that such or such maxims were generally received, or that such practices were sanctioned by custom: there will be one standard to which every principle and every action will be referred. The sacred volume will lie open before the Judge: and every erroneous sentiment be confronted with the dictates of inspiration. The Judge himself will know no other rule of judgment: every thing that accorded with the scriptures will be approved; and every thing that contradicted them, will be condemned. To what end then is it to impose specious names on things, when they will so soon appear in their true light? Will *God* call evil good, and good evil because *we* have done so? Can we convince *him* that light was darkness, and darkness light, because we persuaded ourselves and others that it was so? What infatuation is it so to trifle with our eternal state! If our error could

be pleaded before God in extenuation of our fault, then indeed we might have some reason for persisting in it: but how can we excuse ourselves before him, when we had the means of information in our hands, and followed our own surmises in preference to his commands?

Let us then remember that we are acting now for eternity; and that in a little time every thing will appear, not as we wish it, but as it really is. And, if we think it of any importance what our condition shall be in the invisible world, let us desist from our self-deception, which, however pleasant or fashionable it may be, will most unquestionably issue in our eternal ruin.

Before we conclude, suffer us to address a word of exhortation both to *those who are deceiving their own souls*, and to *those who desire to regulate their conduct according to truth*.

To the former we beg leave to propose one solemn question: God has said, *Woe unto them that call evil good, &c.* Can *you* change that woe into a blessing? Can *you* prevail on God to retract his word? Can *you* make void that sentence, when God shall come to execute it upon you in the last day? Yea, will you not then curse your folly, for using such pains to deceive yourselves and others, and for involving yourselves in everlasting misery, when, if you had not so "rebelled against the light," you might have been heirs of everlasting glory? Permit me then to address you in the words of the Apostle, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Begin to weigh both sentiments and actions in the balance of the sanctuary. Begin to "judge righteous judgment." Begin to view things, as you will surely view them when you shall stand at the tribunal of Christ. Bear in mind, that in your present state God has denounced a woe against you. Remember too, that it will be small consolation to you to have others involved in the same misery with yourselves: it will rather be a source of more intense misery to all, by reason of their mutual execrations, for having so greatly contributed to each others ruin. If the word of God be intended for "a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths," then make use of it; study it, as it were, upon your knees: meditate upon it day and night: and beg of

God “to open your understandings that you may understand it,” and to sanctify your hearts that you may obey it.

To those who are of a better mind we say, Be, strong, and dare to stem the torrent of iniquity, that would bear down all before it. Be not ashamed to call good and evil by their proper names; and to shew by the whole tenor of your lives, that you know how to distinguish them. Let not too great weight be given to the opinions of men. Bow not to the authority of fashion and custom; but “prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.” Bring your advisers to “the law and to the testimony: for if they speak not according to that, there is no light in them.” In matters of duty or of discipline indeed you cannot be too diffident, you cannot be too submissive. In those things obedience is your highest honour. But when men presume to *think* for you in the concerns of your souls, it is high time to enquire, whether they will also *perish* for you? If you perish, you must perish for yourselves; and therefore it behoves you to think for yourselves, and to act for yourselves. The self-deceiving world cannot remove the woe from their own souls; much less can they from yours. “Walk not then according to the course of this world:” “follow not a multitude to do evil.” Look not at your neighbours, but at Christ and his apostles. Let the scriptures regulate your every sentiment, your every act. And without concerning yourselves about the misrepresentations which blind and ungodly men will give of your conduct, “be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

CCCLIII. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

Hos. viii. 7. *They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.*

MISERY is attached to sin as its inevitable consequence—

This connection does not always appear to a superficial observer—

On the contrary transgression often seems productive of happiness—

And obedience, to be a source of much affliction and trouble—

But, whatever conclusions we may be led to draw from present appearances, we are sure that the wicked are not happy—

Nor have they any reasonable expectation of happiness in the eternal world—

The Israelites had forsaken the true God for idols—

And God warned them of the judgments which would ere long come upon them—

But the declaration in the text may be understood as a general position—

We shall take occasion from it to shew

I. Who may be said to sow the wind

To “sow the wind” is a proverbial expression for labouring in vain—

It is applied to idolaters, because the silver and gold lavished on idols was unprofitably spent—

And it may well be applied to all who seek happiness in a way of sin

1. To sensualists

[They expect to find much comfort in the indulgence of their lusts—

Hence they yield themselves up to all the gratifications of sense—

But they find that such pursuits can afford them no real happiness—

While they forsake the fountain of living waters they hew out to themselves only broken cisterns that can hold no water^a—

Solomon, with the amplest means of enjoyment, confessed this^b—

And we may address that appeal to all the votaries of pleasure^c]—

2. To worldlings

[The lovers of this present world seem to follow something substantial—

They hope to obtain, not a momentary gratification, but solid and lasting benefits—

^a Jer. ii. 13.

^b Eccl. ii. 1. 10, 11.

^c Rom. vi. 21.

They promise to themselves the acquisition of ease, and affluence and respect—

But riches are justly, and on many accounts, termed “uncertain”^d—

No dependence can be placed on their continuance with us^e—

Our cares are also generally multiplied by means of them—

But if they were more conducive to happiness now, what shall they profit in the day of wrath?^f—

What advantage has he now, who once took such delight in his stores^g—

Or he, who placed his happiness in sumptuous fare, and magnificent apparel?^h—

Surely all such persons will find ere long, that they “sowed the wind”—]

3. To formalists

[The performance of religious duties seems more calculated to make us happy—

It is certain that no one can be happy who disregards them—

But a mere round of services can never satisfy the conscience—

“The form of godliness without the power” will avail little—

It will leave the soul in a poor, empty, destitute condition—

Some indeed delude themselves with an idea that it will secure the divine favour—

And, under that delusion, they may be filled with self-complacencyⁱ—

But if God send a ray of light into the mind, these comforts vanish—

A sight of sin will speedily dissipate these self-righteous hopes^k—

Nor will any thing satisfy an enlightened conscience but that which satisfies God—

There was but one remedy for the wounded Israelites in the wilderness^l—

Nor can a wounded spirit ever be healed but by a sight of Christ—]

4. To false professors

[Many wish to be thought religious, when they are destitute of spiritual life—

^d 1 Tim. vi. 17.

^e Prov. xxiii. 5.

^f Prov. xi. 4.

^g Luke xii. 19.

^h Luke xvi. 19, 23, 24.

ⁱ Luke xviii. 11, 12.

^k Rom. vii. 9.

^l John iii. 14, 15.

They perhaps are zealous for the doctrines of the gospel, and for their own particular form of church government—

But they are not solicitous to live nigh to God in holy duties—

Nor do they manifest the efficacy of religion in their spirit and conduct—

Yet, because of their professing godliness, they think themselves possessed of it—

And buoy up themselves with expectations of happiness in the world to come—

Alas! what disappointment will they one day experience!^m—

What will it avail them to “have had a name to live while they were really dead?”—

Or to have “cried, Lord, Lord, while they departed not from iniquity?”—

The pains they have taken to keep up a profession, will all be lost—

Nothing will remain to them but shame and confusion of face—]

From the seed which they sow we may easily perceive

II. What they may expect to reap

“A whirlwind” is a figure used to represent extraordinary calamities—

And such is the harvest which they will reap in due season—

Their calamities will be

1. Sudden

[The corn ripens gradually for the sickle, and its fate is foreseen—

But the destruction of the ungodly cometh suddenly and at an instant

They indeed have many warnings from all which they see around them—

But they put the evil day far from them, and think it will never come^o—

Thus it was with the whole world before the deluge—

Though Noah preached to them for many years, they would not regard him—

And were taken by surprise at last, as much as if no notice had been given them^p—

Thus also it will be with all who reject the gospel salvation—

Solomon has expressly declared it in reference to those who sow discord^q—

^m Matt. xxv. 11, 12.

ⁿ Prov. i. 27.

^o 2 Pet. iii. 4.

^p Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.

^q Prov. vi. 14.

And St. Paul has asserted it respecting all that live in a neglect of God^r]

2. Irresistible

[Sinners of every description can withstand the word spoken by their fellow-creatures^s—

But they will not be able to resist God when he shall call them into judgment—

Then, if the whole universe should enter into a confederacy to protect one sinner, they would fail in their attempt^t—

There is not any thing more irresistible to man, in some climates, than a whirlwind—

Yet far less power shall the ungodly have to avert the wrath of God—

They will be carried to destruction as the chaff before the wind^u—

And call in vain to the rocks to fall upon them, or the hills to cover them^v]—

3. Tremendous

[Nothing can be conceived more dreadful than the desolation made by whirlwinds—

Yet this suggests a very inadequate idea of the ruin that will come on the ungodly—

The raining of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah must have been exceeding terrible—

But even that was light, when compared with the vials of God's wrath which will be poured out upon the ungodly world—

Who can comprehend the full import of that threatening in the Psalms?^y—

Who can form a just idea of the judgment denounced by Isaiah^z—

May we never experience such dreadful calamities!—

May we tremble at the apprehension of them, and seek shelter in Christ!^a]—

INFER

1. How earnest should we be in redeeming time!

[The present hours are given us that we may sow for eternity—

Every action, word and thought is as seed that will spring up hereafter—

According to what we saw now, we shall reap at the last day^b—

^r 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

^s Ezek. xx. 49.

^t Prov. xi. 21.

^u Ps. i. 4, 5.

^x Rev. vi. 15—17.

^y Ps. xi. 6.

^z Isaiah v. 24.

^a Isaiah xxxii. 2.

^b Gal. vi. 7, 8.

Every moment increases our “treasure of wrath,” or our “weight of glory”—

How should we be affected with this consideration!—

Let us lay it to heart, and “walk not as fools, but as wise men”^c—

And let that just exhortation shame us to a sense of duty^d]—

2. How blessed are they who are living to God!

[There is not a work which they perform for him that will not be rewarded—

God would esteem himself unjust if he made them no recompence^e—

However small and insignificant the service be, it shall not be forgotten^f—

Some perhaps may complain, that they cannot do any thing for God—

And, that they can only weep for their unprofitableness—

But the sighs and tears of the contrite are “precious seed”—

They will spring up to a glorious and abundant harvest^g—

Let the humble then go on “sowing in tears till they reap in joy”—

Let them persist in their labour, assured that it shall not be in vain^h]—

^e Eph. v. 15, 16.

^f Matt. x. 42.

^g Isaiah lv. 2.

^h Ps. cxxvi. 6.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 10.

^j 1 Cor. xv. 58.

CCCLIV. NO PEACE TO THE WICKED.

Isaiah lvii. 20, 21. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

WE need not wait till a future life in order to discern the difference between the righteous and the wicked: it is plainly discoverable now in their conduct; nor is it less so in the inward frame of their minds—To a superficial observer indeed the wicked may seem to have the advantage; they being light and gay, while the righteous are often weary and heavy-laden: but God, who sees through the veil of outward appearances, affirms the very reverse of this to be true—We shall

I. Confirm his assertion

There certainly is a kind of peace which the wicked may, and do possess.

[By “the wicked” we are not necessarily to understand, those who are vicious and profane; but all persons who are not devoted to God in the habitual exercise of righteousness and true holiness—And when it is said that such persons have “no peace,” we must not imagine that they have no comfort or satisfaction in earthly enjoyments; for they are full of life and spirit; they shake off, what they call, melancholy; they banish all thoughts of God, and indulge in conviviality and mirth;^a and, as far as animal gratifications can conduce to happiness, they are happy—Neither must we suppose them wholly destitute of what they mistake for peace: they often persuade themselves of the safety of their state, and in a very confident manner assert their relation to God as his children^b—Having fixed the standard of duty according to their own mind; and, finding that, for the most part, they attain to what they deem a sufficient measure of religion, they “speak peace unto themselves, when alas! there is no peace”^c]—]

—But there is a scriptural peace of which they are wholly ignorant

[The peace, which our Lord gives to his faithful followers, and which he emphatically calls *his* peace,^d is very different from any thing which an unregenerate man has ever experienced—It consists in a well-grounded hope that “Christ has loved us and given himself for us;” and in “the testimony of our conscience” that we are walking agreeably to his mind and will—This peace is not a blind persuasion contrary to all the declarations of God’s word, but an humble confidence founded upon the sacred oracles, and a joyful expectation that God will fulfil his gracious promises—Now such a peace as this, the wicked never feel: they do not seek it; they would not even accept it upon God’s terms, because they would not submit to have their conduct regulated by his holy law: indeed they account the experience of it to be the height of enthusiasm, and suppose that they who profess to have attained it are actuated by pride, and blinded by delusion—Can it then be any wonder that such persons should never enjoy this peace themselves?—]

The truth of this assertion will more clearly appear while we

^a Isaiah v. 11, 12.

^b Jer. vi. 14.

^c John viii. 39, 41.

^d John xiv. 27.

II. Shew the grounds and reasons of it

We need not look further than the text to find ample materials for confirming the declaration before us: for it asserts that the wicked are in a state absolutely incompatible with true peace—"Like the troubled sea they can never rest" by reason of

1. Depraved appetites

[However eminent for piety men may be, it is certain they will find much occasion for sorrow on account of their inward depravity: but they strive to mortify their lusts; they resist them in their first rise; and pray to God for strength to subdue them: whereas the wicked, however moral they may outwardly appear, encourage the growth of their vile affections: instead of repressing inward impurity, they enjoy the company, they relish the conversation, they read the books, they frequent the amusements which have a tendency to foster their corruptions; and, though from prudential considerations they impose a restraint on their actions, they will harbour evil thoughts without resistance and without remorse—The same may be said respecting their worldliness, their ambition, and every other evil appetite—As the apostle says of the impure, that they have "eyes full of adultery, and that they cannot cease from sin," so, whatever else be the predominant passion of their hearts, they cease not from the indulgence of it; but yield to it as far as they can consistently with the preservation of their character in the world—How then can they possess peace, whose hearts are so disturbed and defiled by their depraved affections?—]

2. Ungoverned tempers

[There is indeed a wonderful difference in the natural tempers and dispositions of men, insomuch that one person, notwithstanding his real piety, shall have much to conflict with, while another shall feel comparatively but little temptation to transgress—Still however, the righteous will have peace, because they labour to bring their minds into subjection to Christ, and apply to the blood of Christ for pardon under every renewed failure; but the wicked will not have peace, because they neither cry to the Lord to pardon their evil tempers, nor pray to him for grace to subdue them—Whatever be their besetting sin, they will fall into it as soon as ever a temptation occurs: is it *p pride?* they will be inflamed at the smallest insult or opposition; and, like Haman, feel no comfort in life, because they are not treated with all the reverence they think due to them^e—Is it *envy?* they cannot en-

^e Esth. v. 9. 12, 13.

dure to behold the success of a rival; but, like Saul, would be glad to hear that he were brought down, or even that he were dead^f—Is it *covetousness*? they shall have no enjoyment of all that they possess, because they have sustained a loss, or been, like Ahab, disappointed in their hopes of attaining something whereon their heart was set—Is it *malice and revenge*? they shall sometimes be so inflamed by the very sight of their enemy, or even by the recollection of the injury they have sustained, that their very blood shall boil within them, and their rest day and night depart from them—Now what room is there for peace in a bosom that is subject to such continual agitation; and which, like the sea, not only is disturbed by every wind, but the instant it is moved, “casts up nothing but mire and dirt?”—]

3. An evil conscience

[Much as they strive to shake off reflection about a future state, they cannot wholly dissipate their fears: in the midst of all their boasted confidence they have some secret misgivings: and if a sickness, which they expect to be fatal, come upon them, they cannot help wishing that their life had been differently spent, and that they might be spared to obtain a better preparation for their appearance before God—Sometimes indeed they do hold fast their delusions to the last, and “God gives them over to believe a lie:” but, for the most part, they both live under the accusations of a guilty conscience, and die under an awful suspense, a dreadful uncertainty about their eternal state—If at any time their minds be awakened to a sense of their true condition, they will tremble, like Belshazzar, when he saw the writing on the wall,^h or like Felix, when Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to comeⁱ—Is it possible that peace should consist with such a state as this? Or need we any thing more to confirm the testimony of God respecting them, That they have no peace?—]

This subject cannot fail of suggesting to us

1. The bitterness of sin

[Men live in sin under the idea that it will make them happy: but though they “roll it as a sweet morsel under their tongue, it proves the very gall of asps within them”^k—It is that which robs us of all solid peace: it is that which renders us altogether incapable of peace, as long as it retains an ascendant over us—We may appeal to the consciences of all who are indulging sin, whether in heart or act, Have you

^f 1 Sam. xviii. 6—9, and xix. 1.

^g 1 Kings xxi. 1—4.

^h Dan. v. 5, 6.

ⁱ Acts xxiv. 25.

^h Job xx. 12—14.

peace? Do you know what it is to have "the love of God shed abroad in your hearts;" to have "the witness of his spirit" testifying of your adoption into his family; and to look forward with pleasure to your appearance at his tribunal? We are sure that no unregenerate man whatever can answer in the affirmative: and why can he not? is it not on account of sin, sin indulged, sin unrepented of?—See then, brethren, what an accursed thing sin is, which robs you of all that is truly valuable; of peace in life, and hope in death, and happiness in eternity—And will you yet harbour it in your hearts?—O flee from it as from the face of a serpent; and let it be the one labour of your lives to mortify and subdue it—]

2. The excellency of the gospel

[Fatal as sin has proved to the present and everlasting welfare of thousands, the gospel offers a full and sufficient remedy—The words before the text are quoted by an inspired apostle in proof that Jesus is our peace, and that having made reconciliation for us through the blood of his cross, he preaches peace to them that are afar off, and to them that are near—Blessed be God, there is efficacy in the blood of Jesus to heal the wounds which sin has made: if it be sprinkled on our hearts by faith, it will purge us from an evil conscience, and speak peace to our souls^m—Apply but that remedy, and you shall soon feel its transcendent worth and efficacy—“May the Lord of peace himself” reveal to you his truth, and “give you peace always by all means”ⁿ—May you be so “justified by faith as to have peace with God;” and may that “peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”^o]—

^l Ver. 19. with Eph. ii. 13—17.

ⁿ 2 Thess. iii. 16.

^m Heb. x. 22. and xii. 24.

^o Phil. iv. 7.

CCCLV. GOD SEES OUR INMOST THOUGHTS.

Heb. iv. 13. *All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

MEN will commit those things in secret, which they would not commit, if they knew that the eye of a fellow-creature was upon them—

But, if they duly considered the omniscience of God, they would be as watchful over their conduct in their

most hidden recesses, as they now are in the noon-day—

Yea, they would impose a far greater restraint on their inmost thoughts, than they now do on their outward actions—

To fortify the Hebrews against apostasy, the apostle endeavoured to impress upon their minds the thought, that every motion of their hearts was strictly noticed by God—

From his words we shall consider

I. The omniscience of God

“There is not any thing in the whole creation which is not manifest in his sight”—At one glance he beholds all

1. Things

[All that is *past*, however long since, or however forgotten by us, is as fresh in his memory, as if it had been transacted this very moment^a—

All *present* things, in whatever quarter of the globe, and however hidden from mortal eyes, are visible to him^b— — —

All *future* events, whomsoever they concern, even the eternal states of all that ever shall be born, are known by him with as much certainty as if they were already accomplished^c— — —]

2. Men.

[The *actions* of men are not only noticed by him, but weighed in a most perfect balance^d— — —

Their *words* are all distinctly heard by him, and recorded before him^e—

Their very *thoughts*, how secret or transient soever they be, are also marked, and written by him in the book of his remembrance^f— — —

The priests, when inspecting the sacrifices that had been *flayed* and *cut asunder*, did not so infallibly discern any blemish that might be found, either on their external part or in their *inwards*, as God discerns “every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts”^g— — —]

^a Isa. xli. 22. ^b Job xxviii. 24. ^c Isa. xlvi. 9, 10. Acts xv. 8.

^d 1 Sam. ii. 3. Job xxxi. 4. ^e Ps. cxxxix. 4. 2 Kings vi. 12.

^f Ezek. xi. 5. Gen. vi. 5.

^g Γεγονέ καὶ τετραχνισμένα. This may be further illustrated by Ps. xi. 4. “his eye-lids try,” &c.

That we may not give our assent to this truth without being suitably affected with it, let us consider

II. The concern we have in it

The words of the text admit of a double interpretation—

We shall include both senses by observing

1. “We have to do with God” in every transaction of our lives

[The law of God extends to the whole of our conduct—

Every action therefore, with every word and thought, is an act of obedience to him or of disobedience—

There is not a possibility of detaching ourselves from him for an instant, so as to assert our independence in the least respect—

Our minds should be constantly full of love to him; and our every purpose and desire should have respect to his glory^h—

How deeply then are we interested in approving ourselves to him!—

If we had merely to do with our fellow-creatures, it might suffice to have our actions right, even though there were some defect in our motives and principles—

But when we have to do with the heart-searching God, we should be careful that every motion of our hearts be agreeable to his mind and will—]

2. We must “give an account to God”ⁱ of all that we do

[Every thing we do is noticed by God, in order that it may be recompensed at the day of judgment^k—

The book of his remembrance will assuredly be opened in that day^l—

And every action, word, and thought during our whole lives will have an influence on his decision—

However trivial any thing may be in our eyes, or even imperceptible by us, it will enhance our happiness or misery to all eternity—

How anxious then should we be to walk as in God’s sight!—

And how should we labour daily to lay up an increasing weight of glory, instead of “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath!”^m—]

^h 1 Cor. x. 31.

ⁱ Ηὗτος δὲ οὐκίν ἡ λόγιας.

^k Jer. xvii. 10.

^l Rev. xx. 12.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 17, with Rom. ii. 5.

We may IMPROVE this subject

1. For the awakening of the careless

[You may think, like those of old, that God does not see or regard your waysⁿ—

But, if Achan was detected and punished by God's immediate interference in this world,^o how much more shall you be in the day of righteous retribution!—]

2. For the encouragement of the sincere

[If God notices the defects of his people, he both makes allowance for them, and observes also their excellencies^p—

Nor have they so much as a good desire, which he does not mark with special approbation^q—

Let all then stir up their hearts to seek and serve him^r—

So, notwithstanding their defects, they shall receive his plaudit in the day of judgments^s—]

ⁿ Ps. xciv. 7.

^o Josh. vii. 14, 18, 25.

^p Compare Ps. ciii. 14. with Rev. ii. 9.

^q Ps. xxxviii. 9. Mal. iii. 16. 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^r 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 5.

CCCLVI. THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT.

Numb. xxxii. 23. *Behold ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.*

THE fear of punishment, if not the best, is certainly the most common preservative from sin—

Under the Mosaic dispensation it was the principal motive with which the divine commands were enforced—

Nor did St. Paul, though so well acquainted with the liberal Spirit of the Gospel, think it wrong to “persuade men by the terrors of the Lord”—

The words before us, therefore may, not improperly, be addressed to us^a—

^a The tribes of Reuben and Gad had solicited permission to have the land of Jazer and of Gilead for their portion instead of any inheritance in the land of Canaan. Upon their promising to fight in conjunction with the other tribes until the whole of Canaan should be subdued, Moses acceded to their proposal; but warned them withal, that, if they receded from their engagement, they should assuredly meet with a due recompence from God.

We may take occasion from them to consider

I. In what manner we have sinned against the Lord

It would be endless to attempt an enumeration of all the sins we have committed—

We shall confine ourselves to that view of them which the context suggests

[The sin against which Moses cautioned the two tribes was, unfaithfulness to their engagements—

And, a preferring of their present ease to the executing of the work which God had assigned them—

Now we promised at our baptism to renounce the world, the flesh, and the Devil^b—

These promises *then* made for us, we have renewed at our confirmation and at the Lord's table—

But how have we kept the covenant which we have thus solemnly entered into?—

Have we not maintained that friendship with the world which is enmity with God?^c—

Have we not rather sought to please than to mortify our carnal appetites?^d—

Has not the god of this world led us captive at his will?^e—

And is not such a life one continued violation of our baptismal engagements?—]

But the sin referred to in the text, will scarcely bear any comparison with ours

[The Israelites were to maintain a warfare with men; we with the Devil^f—

They were to fight for an earthly portion; we, an heavenly^g—

They might have urged that *their* aid was unnecessary, when God was engaged—

And that, after all, the prize was an inadequate reward for such fatigue and danger—

But, can we hope to conquer without exerting our own powers?—

Do we suppose that God will subdue our enemies without our concurrence?—

Or can we say that the prize held forth to us is not worth the contest?—

If our engagements be more solemn, our work more noble, and our reward more glorious than theirs, our sin in disregarding all must be proportionably greater—

^b See the Church Catechism. ^c James iv. 4. ^d Tit. iii. 3.

^e Eph. ii. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 26. ^f Eph. vi. 12. ^g 1 Cor. iv. 25.

Yet who amongst us must not confess that he has forgotten all his vows?—

Behold then, we may say to all, “ Ye have sinned against the Lord”]

Nor are we to suppose that our sin will always pass unnoticed

II. What assurance we have that our sin shall find us out

Sin may be said to find us out when it brings down the divine judgments upon us

[Conscience, stupified or seared, often forgets to execute its office—

Nor speaks, till God, by his Providence or Grace, awaken it—

Sometimes years elapse before it reprobates our iniquities^h—

Sometimes it testifies to our face as soon as our sin is committedⁱ—

Whenever it thus condemns us, our sins may be said to find us out—

But the expression in the text imports rather the visitation of God for sin—

There is a punishment annexed to every violation of God’s law^k—

And sin then finds us out effectually when it brings that punishment upon us—]

That it will find us out, we have the fullest possible assurance

[*The perfections of God’s nature* absolutely preclude all hope of impunity

If he be omnipresent, he must see; if omniscient, remember; if holy, hate; and if just, punish the violations of his law—

If he be possessed of veracity and power, he must execute the judgments he has denounced—

The declarations of his Word abundantly confirm this awful truth^l—

Sin leaves a track which can never be effaced; and evil, however slow-paced, will surely overtake it^m—

However scoffers may exult in their security, their ruin is fast approachingⁿ—

^h Gen. xlvi. 21, 22.

ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 74, 75. and xxvii. 3, 4.

^k Ezek. xviii. 4.

^l Isaiah iii. 11. Rom. ii. 9. Ps. xxi. 8. Prov. xi. 21.

^m Prov. xiii. 21. Ps. cxli. 11.

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 3. and iii. 4, 9. and Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

The remarkable instances of sin being detected and punished in this world afford a strong additional testimony—

David and Gehazi, though so studious to conceal their guilt, had their iniquity marked in the punishment inflicted for it^o—

When, according to human calculations, it was above two millions to one that Achan would escape, the lot fell on him by an infallible direction^p—

How much more then shall the most hidden things be brought to light hereafter!—

The appointment of a day of final retribution puts the matter beyond a possibility of doubt—

For what end can there be such a period fixed but that the actions of men may be judged—

And for what end can they be judged, but that every man may receive according to his deeds?^q—

We may then emphatically say to every sinner, “Be sure, &c.”—]

INFERN

1. How earnest should we be in searching out our own sins!

[We think little of evils which have been committed by us long ago—

And imagine that they are effaced from God’s memory as well as from our own—

But every action, word and thought is noted in the book of his remembrance—

He sees the transactions of former years as if they had this moment passed—

All our iniquities are viewed by him in one accumulated mass—

Nor does he abhor them less than in the very instant they were committed—

Let us not then pass them over, or palliate them, as youthful follies—

Let us remember how exactly the Lord’s threatenings were executed on the Israelites in the wilderness^r—

And endeavour to avert his judgments while space for repentance is allowed us—

Let us mourn over our innumerable violations of our baptismal covenant—

Let us lament our solicitude about a present portion, our aversion to fight the Lord’s battles, and our indifference about the heavenly Canaan—

^o 2 Sam. xii. 9—12. 2 Kings v. 26, 27. ^p Josh. vii. 14—18.

^q Eccl. xii. 14.

^r Num. xxxii. 10—13.

We must repent of these things, or lie under the guilt of them for ever^s]—

2. How thankful should we be that a way of escape is provided for us!

[It is not sin lamented, but sin unrepented of, which will find us out—

There is a city of refuge provided for those who will flee to it—

The man, Christ Jesus, is an hiding-place from the impending storm^u—

If we flee to him, we may be sure that sin shall NOT find us out—

Every perfection of the Deity is pledged to save a believing penitent^v—

We are confirmed in this hope by the most *positive declarations of scripture*—

We have most *authentic and astonishing instances* of sin forgiven^w—

And *the day of judgment* is appointed no less for the complete justification of believers than for the condemnation of unbelievers^x—

Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly on our minds—

Let it encourage us to take refuge under the Saviour's wings^y—

Let an holy confidence inspire those who have committed their souls to him^z—

And let all rejoice and glory in him as able to save them to the uttermost^a]—

^s Ps. l. 21. Luke xiii. 3. ^t Heb. vi. 18. ^u Isaiah xxxii. 2.

^x 1 John i. 9. ^v Isaiah xliv. 22. Mic. vii. 19. Heb. viii. 12.

^z 2 Sam. xii. 13. Luke vii. 47, and xxiii. 43. ^a 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

^b Matt. xxiii. 37. ^c 2 Tim. i. 12. ^d Heb. vii. 25.

CCCLVII. THE DANGER OF FORGETTING GOD.

Psalm ix. 17. *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.*

THE most eminent saints are represented in scripture as weeping over an ungodly world—Nor would this exercise of compassion be so rare, if we duly considered how great occasion there is for it—The words before us are a plain and unequivocal declaration from God himself respecting the doom which awaits every impenitent sinner

—May God impress our minds with a solemn awe, while we shew

I. Whom they are whom God esteems wicked

If we consult the opinions of men, we shall find that they differ widely from each other in their ideas of moral guilt, and that they include more or less in their definition of wickedness according to their own peculiar habits of life; every one being careful so to draw the line that he himself may not be comprehended within it—But God does not consult our wishes, or accommodate his word to our partial regards: he denominates all them wicked, who “forget” him—Doubtless there are degrees of guilt; but all those are wicked in his sight who are forgetful of

1. His laws

[These ought to be written on our hearts, and to be the invariable rule of our conduct—It should be our constant inquiry, What is duty? what does God command?—But if this be no part of our concern, if our enquiry be continually, “What will please myself; what will advance my interests: what will suit the taste of those around me;” are we not wicked? Do we not in all such instances rebel against God, and become, as it were, a God unto ourselves?—Yet who amongst us has not been guilty in these respects?—]

2. His mercies

[Every day and hour of our lives we have been laden with mercies by a kind and bountiful Benefactor—And should they not have excited correspondent emotions of gratitude in our hearts? Yea, should they not have filled our mouths with praises and thanksgivings?—But what shall we say to that greatest of all mercies, the gift of God’s dear Son to die for us? Has not *that* deserved our devoutest acknowledgments?—What then if we have passed days and years without any affectionate remembrance of God?—What if we have even abused the bounties of his providence, and poured contempt upon the riches of his grace?—What if we have “trodden under foot the Son of God, and done despite to the Spirit of grace?” Are we not wicked? Do we account such ingratitude a venial offence, when exercised by a dependent towards ourselves?—]

3. His presence

[God is every where present, and every object around us has this inscription upon it, “Thou God seest me”—Now it

is our duty and privilege to walk with God as his friends, and to set him before us all the day long—But, suppose we have been unmindful of his presence, and have indulged without remorse those thoughts, which we could not have endured to carry into effect in the presence of a fellow-creature; suppose we have been careless and unconcerned even when we were assembled in God's house of prayer; suppose that instead of having him in all our thoughts, we have lived “without him in the world;” are we not wicked?—Is it necessary to have added murder or adultery to such crimes as these in order to constitute us wicked?—Does God judge thus, when he declares that they who are thus without God, are at the same time “without hope?”^a]—

While we rectify our notions respecting the persons that are wicked, let us enquire

II. What is to be their final doom

The word “hell” sometimes imports no more than the grave; but here it must mean somewhat far more awful; because the righteous go into the grave as well as the most abandoned—

Hell is a place of inconceivable misery

[Men in general do not wish to hear this place so much as mentioned, much less described as the portion of the wicked: but it is better far to hear of it, than to dwell in it; and it is by hearing of it that we must be persuaded to avoid it^b—Our Lord represents it as a place originally formed for the reception of the fallen angels; and very frequently labours to deter men from sin by the consideration of its terrors—And who that reflects upon that “lake of fire and brimstone,” where the wicked “dwell with everlasting burnings,” and “weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth” without so much as the smallest hope of deliverance from it, and where “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever;” who that considers what it must be to have the devils for our companions, and to have the vials of God’s wrath poured out upon us, without intermission and without end; who that considers these things, must not tremble at the thought of taking up his abode in that place?]—

Yet must that be the portion of all that forget God

[Now scoffers make light of eternal torments, and puff at the denunciations of God’s wrath; but ere long they will

^a Eph. ii. 12. ^b 2 Cor. v. xi. ^c Luke xii. 5. Mark ix. 43—48.

wish that "the rocks might fall upon them, and the hills cover them" from his impending judgments—But, however reluctant they be to obey the divine mandate, they must "depart;" they will be "turned" into hell with irresistible violence, and with fiery indignation—Their numbers will not at all secure them against the threatened vengeance: though there be whole "nations," they will not be able to withstand the arm of God; nor will they excite commiseration in his heart: neither will their misery be the less because of the multitudes who partake of it; for, instead of alleviating one another's sorrows with tender sympathy, they will accuse one another with the bitterest invectives—The power and veracity of God are pledged to execute this judgment; and sooner shall heaven and earth be annihilated, than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail—]

INFER

1. How awful is the insensibility in which the world are living!

[Men seem as careless and indifferent about their eternal interests, as if they had nothing to apprehend; or as if God had promised that the wicked should be received into heaven—But can they set aside the declaration that is now before us? Or do they suppose it is intended merely to alarm us; and that it shall never be executed upon us? "Is God then a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent?"—O that they would awake from their infatuation, and flee from the wrath to come!—]

2. How just will be the condemnation of sinners in the last day!

[Many think it an hard thing that so heavy a judgment should be denounced merely for forgetting God—But is this so small an offence as they imagine? Is it not rather exceeding heinous? Does it not imply the basest ingratitude, the most daring rebellion, yea, a great degree even of atheism itself?—And shall not God visit for these things, and be avenged on such transgressors as these?—Shall they be at liberty to abase God's mercies, and God not be at liberty to suspend the communication of his blessings?—Shall they despise and trample on God's laws, and God not be at liberty to assert their authority?—Shall they say to God, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" and shall God be accused of injustice if he say to them, "Depart; ye shall never have one glimpse of my presence any more?"—But if they will dare to open their mouths against him now, the time is shortly coming, when they will stand self-convicted, and self-condemned—]

3. How marvellous are the patience and the mercy of God!

[God has seen the whole race of man departing from him, and blotting out, as much as they could, the remembrance of him from the earth—His authority, his love, his mercy, are, as it were, by common consent banished from the conversation and from the very thoughts of men—Yet, instead of burning with indignation against us, and “turning us all quick into hell,” he bears with us, he invites us to mercy, he says, “Deliver them from going down into the pit; for I have found a ransom”^d—O that we might be duly sensible of his mercy! O that we might flee for refuge to the hope set before us!—If once we be cast into hell, we shall never obtain “one drop of water to cool our tongues;” but “this is the accepted time;” the Lord grant that we may find it also, “the day of salvation!”—]

^d Job xxxiii. 24.

CCCLVIII. THE CHARACTER AND END OF THE WICKED.

Prov. xiii. 5. *The wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame.*

THE world in general uphold and countenance one another in their evil ways: some will even “make a mock at sin,” and glory in it. But God’s testimony respecting the wicked man is, that, whatever be his rank, or talents, or estimation among men, he is indeed “loathsome, and cometh to shame.”

In these words we behold

I. The character of the wicked

The wicked comprehend all who are not righteous

[There are but two classes of persons mentioned in the scriptures; and to one or other of them we all belong. There is no intermediate character. We indeed cannot always determine to which of these classes men belong, because we cannot discern the heart: but God, to whom all things are naked and open, will distinguish them from each other as easily as we do the sheep from the goats.]

It is of infinite importance that we should have this truth impressed on our minds: for we are ready to rank among the wicked those only who are guilty of great enormities:

whereas all are wicked who are not truly righteous; all, who are not converted to God, and renewed in the spirit of their minds.]

God's testimony respecting them is applicable to them all, whether they be more or less wicked in respect of gross sins

[*The openly profane* are doubtless exceeding loathsome in the sight of God. Let any one but notice their conversation; how replete is it with lewdness and blasphemy! Let their tempers be marked; what evil dispositions do they manifest on all occasions! Let their conduct be scrutinized, their drunkenness, their whoredoms, and all their other abominations; and who must not confess the justice of that representation, which compares them to swine wallowing in the mire, and dogs devouring their own vomit?^a

The more decent, it is true, are not so vile in the eyes of men, (yea, perhaps they are honoured and esteemed) but they also are loathsome in the sight of God. What monsters of ingratitude are the very best of unregenerate men! What mercies have they received from God; what inconceivable love has been shewn them by the Lord Jesus Christ; and yet they have never spent one hour in humble and grateful adorations. If they had laboured thus to win the affections of some worthless wretch, and after many years of uninterrupted kindness were requited by him as they requite their God, would they not consider *him* as deserving of utter execration? How loathsome then must *they* be, whose obligations are infinitely greater, and whose conduct is inexpressibly more vile! Their actions, it is confessed, may have been fair and specious: but what have their hearts been? have they not been a very sink of iniquity?^b Yes; so depraved are the very best of men, that there are few, if any, who would not rather die, than have all the secrets of their hearts known to men as they are known to God. What then are such persons, but whitened sepulchres?^c No wonder that, however they be esteemed among men, both their persons and services are an abomination to the Lord.^d]

Conformable to their character must surely be
II. Their end

Sin is in itself inconceivably vile, and will bring its votaries to shame

^a 2 Pet. ii. 22. Sec also Job xv. 16. Ps. liii. 1—3.

^b Jer. xvii. 9. Gen. vi. 5.

^c Matt. xxiii. 27.

^d Luke xv. 16. Prov. xv. 8, 26. and xxviii. 9.

1. In this world

[How often are the fairest characters blasted by detection, and exposed to infamy! The deeds of darkness, when brought to light, often reflect such dishonour upon men, as to make them shun society; and put a period to their own existence. And how many are brought to die by the hands of a public executioner, and to entail disgrace on their latest posterity! Little do men think, when first they yield to temptation, whither sin will lead them. It is a principal device of Satan to conceal the consequences of sin, and to make men believe that they can recede from it whenever they please: but when he has once entangled their feet, they find to their cost, that they cannot escape from his net.]

2. In the world to come

[There are many who pass honourably through life, and, for their conduct in society, deserve every token of our respect. But God will try the hearts of men in the last day; and “will bring to light every secret thing, whether it be good or evil.” Then what shame will overwhelm the most specious moralist, whose heart was unrenewed by grace! A want of love to Christ now is thought but a light matter: but then it will appear in its true colours, as deserving of God’s heaviest indignation.^e Secret lusts too are overlooked as though they did not at all defile the soul: but they will then be found to have made us altogether loathsome and odious to God.^f Then will Christ^g with all his saints^h and angelsⁱ unite in expressing their abhorrence of these whitened sepulchres; so fully shall that declaration be verified, They shall awake to shame, and everlasting contempt.^k]

We cannot IMPROVE this subject better than by pointing out

1. What is that repentance which such persons need

[It is by no means sufficient to confess that we are sinners: we should feel that we are indeed loathsome;^l and should be filled with shame on account of the extreme vileness of our hearts.^m Nothing less than this will constitute that “repentance which is not to be repented of.”ⁿ]

2. How their character and end may be completely changed

[Loathsome as we are we may be purified by the blood of Jesus, and be made without spot or blemish in the sight of

^e 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^f Ezek. xiv. 4, 7.

^g Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 2.

ⁱ Matt. xiii. 41, 42.

^k Dan. xii. 2.

^l Isaiah lxiv. 6.

^m Ezek. xxxvi. 31, & xvi. and Rom. vi. 21.

ⁿ See Ezra ix. 6. Job xl. 4. and xlvi. 6.

God.^o Our natures also may be changed by his Spirit, so that we shall possess a beauty that God himself shall admire.^p Yea, instead of having shame for our portion, we shall be made to inherit “glory and honour and immortality.” We shall be sons of the living God, and be seated with Christ on thrones of glory. Let us then seek this change, and rely on God’s promises, that by means of them it may be accomplished in us.^{q]}

^o Eph. v. 25—27.

^p 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^q 2 Cor. vii. 1.

CCCLIX. THE FINAL STATES OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

Isaiah iii. 10, 11. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

THE ministers of the gospel are “stewards of the mysteries of God,” whose office it is “rightly to divide the word of truth,” and to “give every one his portion in due season.” They are to “take forth the precious from the vile, and to be as God’s mouth to all,” declaring their true character, and their proper doom. Their commission is sealed in the words before us, and the very message they are to deliver as God’s ambassadors, is recorded for their direction to the end of time. In complying with the duty here enjoined, we shall

I. Describe the characters that are to be addressed

There are but two classes of men in the world; “the righteous” and “the wicked.”

[However diversified men’s states may be in some particulars, they all must be ranked under the one or the other of these heads. In distinguishing them therefore, we must include in the first class, not merely the more eminent saints, but the least and meanest of God’s people; seeing that there are in God’s household “babes, and young men, as well as fathers.”^a And in the second class we must comprehend all those persons,

^a 1 John ii. 13.

who, however admired by an undiscerning world, are reputed wicked in the sight of God.

They then are “righteous,” who have been renewed in the spirit of their mind, and are following after universal holiness — — — They, on the other hand, are “wicked,” who are still in a carnal unregenerate state, and render only a formal and partial obedience to the divine law — — —

To these distinct classes does God send a separate message; and therefore it is of great importance that we should ascertain to which we belong. Let us then, before we proceed to the consideration of God’s message, enquire seriously to which of these classes we belong? Have we, or have we not, been born again^b — — — Are we panting after universal holiness; or do we shrink from the more spiritual and self-denying duties of our religion? — — —]

We intreat all to arrange themselves, as it were, before God in that particular class to which conscience tells them they belong; and to attend with solemn awe, while we

II. Deliver God’s message to each of them

God commands his ministers to “warn the wicked,”^c but to “comfort his people.”^d In obedience to him we will address

1. The righteous

[It is possible that, on account of the smallness of your attainments, you may be saying, “I fear it will go ill with me at last.” But God says, “It shall be well with you;” and, in spite of all your fears (if only you press forward in the ways of righteousness) it shall be well with you, in life, in death, and to all eternity. We cannot promise you affluence, or exemption from pain and trouble; but we can promise, in the name of God, that your trials, whatever they be, shall work for good;^e that your latter end shall be peace;^f and that you shall have a crown of righteousness and glory at the instant of your departure from the body.^g

These are the things which you labour to attain; and you shall surely “eat the fruit of your doings.” Dismiss then your unbelieving fears: for this is the word of your faithful God, whom neither the subtlety of Satan can deceive, nor his power withstand.]

2. The wicked

[Glad should we be, if we could say, It shall be well with

^b John iii. 3.

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 7.

^d Isaiah xl. 1.

^e Rom. viii. 28.

^f Psalm xxxvii. 37.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 8.

you. But if we should dare to deliver such a message, the falsehood of it must immediately appear———Against you, God sends us to denounce woe: “Woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him.” You, under the influence of presumption, may be saying, “I hope, notwithstanding what is spoken in the Bible, that it will fare well with me at last.” But, if there be any truth in God, it must be *ill* with you. Even in the midst of all your boasted enjoyments we defy you to say, that you have any solid peace;ⁱ and in your dying hour, if you are not insensible as beasts, you will be full of regret and terror;^k and, after death, you will lie down in everlasting burnings!^l

Nor is this unjust, since you reap only what you sowed. You chose the world as your portion; and you have nothing beyond it: you “*would* have none of God;”^m and you have none of him: you said to him, “Depart;”ⁿ and he says to you, “Depart.”^o In your banishment from God and heaven, “the reward of your own hands is given to you.”

Painful it is to deliver such a message; but we must deliver it at the peril of our souls;^p and whether it be credited or not, it shall be confirmed and ratified in heaven.^q]

We cannot conclude without recommending to your NOTICE

1. The equity of the future judgment

[The decision of the Judge will be grounded entirely on our works. No man that was righteous in this world, shall perish; nor shall any man that persisted in his wickedness, be saved. The reward indeed that will be given to the righteous, will be the gift of grace for Christ’s sake: whereas that which will be given to the wicked, will be the just wages of their iniquity.^r Still however, the quality of every person’s works will determine his state; and the happiness or misery of each will be proportioned to his improvement or abuse of the talents committed to him. Let every person therefore remember, that he is daily and hourly treasuring up for himself that which shall be delivered to him again at the day of judgment;^s and that, if he perish for ever, he will have none to blame for it but himself.]

2. The importance of preparing for our great account

[If the declarations in the text proceeded from man, they might well be disregarded. But they are the words of God;

^h Put it into language, and how terrible will it sound!

ⁱ Isaiah lvii. 20, 21.

^k I. ccl. v. 17

^l Rev. xxi. 8.

^m Psalm lxxxi. 11.

ⁿ Job xxi. 14, and xxii. 17.

^o Matt. xxv. 41.

^p Ezek. xxxiii. 8. ^q Matt. xviii. 18.

^r Rom. vi. 23.

^s Gal. vi. 8.

and are as truly spoken to us by him, as if they were now uttered by an audible voice from heaven. Should we not then take warning? Should not the wicked enquire how they may become righteous; and the righteous increase their diligence to hold on in God's holy ways? Would to God this effect might now be produced! how gladly should we set Christ before you as an all-sufficient Saviour! and how joyfully should we proclaim the promises of God both to sincere penitents,^t and to humble believers!^u Let all stir themselves up without delay, and prepare in earnest to meet their God.]

3. The use and benefit of divine ordinances

[In the world, we may pass days and years, and never once hear the sentiment, That it shall go ill with the wicked. On the contrary, we shall hear ten thousand assertions that encourage a directly opposite opinion. And, if a friendly monitor attempt to undeceive us, he is accounted rude, harsh, fanatical. But in the house of God we may venture to speak with plainness, and to declare the determinations of heaven. God sends us for this very purpose, that we may draw aside the vail of futurity, and open to your view the things that shall be hereafter. We are to shew you “the righteous shining forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,” and the wicked “lifting up their eyes with unavailing wishes in the torments of hell.” Let the ordinances then be reverenced with humble gratitude, and improved with unwearied assiduity.*]

^t Isaiah lv. 7.

^u Job. xvii. 9.

* If this were the subject of an *Assize Sermon*, this third remark might be to this effect; *The use and benefit of human judicatories*; which are intended to distribute justice, as far as possible, in this world, as God himself will distribute it in the world to come.

CCCLX. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRUITFUL AND BARREN PROFESSORS.

Heb. vi. 7, 8. The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

COMPARISONS, when just, have the double effect of illustrating, and of confirming, any truth, which they set before us. They have not indeed the force of demonstration, when considered as arguments: but they are peculiarly calculated to impress the mind; and, in that view, have often a stronger effect than the clearest statements, or most logical deductions. Of this kind is the comparison in the text, which is adduced to illustrate the guilt and danger of apostasy. It exhibits figuratively in a way of contrast,

I. The character and end of the godly

[Ground, if good, will cause the fruits that are planted in it to spring up, as soon as it is watered by seasonable and refreshing showers: and the more fruitful it is, the more will it be honoured with the attention and regard of its owner.

In this we may see the *character* of the true christian. He drinks in with avidity the “ word, which distils as the dew, and drops as the rain upon the tender grass.”^a He hears it with a desire to profit by it; and he endeavours to have it constantly influential on his spirit and conduct. Hence he brings forth in increasing abundance the fruits of faith, and love, and universal holiness; and, like his divine Master, “ does always the things which are pleasing to his God.”^b

In this too we may see his *end*. His fruitfulness is not indeed the cause, but rather the effect, of God’s love to him. Nevertheless God graciously accepts his pious endeavours; and, for Christ’s sake,^c rewards them with the richest blessings. He fills his soul with joy and peace; he enables him to maintain a holy and heavenly conversation; he comforts him in the hour of death; and exalts him to an eternity of glory. Thus fully is that promise verified, “ The faithful man shall abound with blessings.”^d]

^a Deut. xxxii. 2.

^b John viii. 29.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^d Prov. xxviii. 20. See also James i. 25.

II. The character and end of the ungodly

[Bad ground, while it participates in common with other soils the influences of heaven, brings forth nothing but briers and thorns, and is therefore abandoned as unworthy of any culture or attention.

How aptly does this describe the *character* of the ungodly, and especially of an apostate from the faith of Christ. While they hear the blessed truths of God, their fruit is altogether worthless in itself, and hateful to him who has bestowed the culture upon them. Their fruits are even injurious, being those of the flesh only, and not of the spirit:^e while the godly, like the myrtle, perfume even the hand that bruises them, *these injure all who come in contact with them.*

And is not the *end* also of such characters justly portrayed in the comparison before us? Doubtless they are disapproved and rejected by their God: nor is it mere dereliction only that they shall suffer, (though that were grievous) but a speedy infliction of eternal punishment. Many are the passages where this awful truth is declared;^f and it shall be experienced by all who remain unfruitful under the culture that is bestowed upon them.]

ADDRESS

1. The careless—How foolish is it to trifle with the means of grace!
2. The backsliders—To what a fearful end are you hastening!
3. The godly—Endeavour to abound more and more in good fruits.^g

^e Gal. v. 19—23.

^f Matt. iii. 12, and xiii. 40—42. John xv. 6. Mark ix. 43—48.

^g Phil. i. 9—11. 1 Thess. iv. 2.

CCCLXI. THE TRUE REASON OF MEN'S DESTRUCTION.

John v. 40. *Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.*

TO doubt whether men wish to be saved or not, may appear absurd—No man would hesitate to answer such a question in the affirmative—But though every one would prefer happiness to misery, they are but few who really prefer the way that leads to happiness—The text may

be addressed to the generality amongst ourselves with the same propriety as to those who rejected the invitations of our Lord in the days of old—We shall take occasion from these words to enquire

I. What are the benefits of coming unto Christ

To “come to Christ” is a frequent expression in the scriptures—It imports not an outward attendance on his person, but an inward affiance on him for salvation—It imports a coming to him *with humility* as sinners, *with faith* as to the only Saviour, and *with love* as to our rightful Lord and Master^a—The coming to him in this manner will secure to us the possession of

Spiritual life

[Even the *temporal comforts* of life are enjoyed by none so much as by him who believes in Christ—Nor is there any other person who holds them by so sure a tenure^b—He cannot fail of possessing them as far as they will conduce to his spiritual welfare—But *spiritual life* is the richest of all blessings—And this is the believer’s assured portion—His soul shall be endued with a new and vital principle of grace—Christ himself will live in him and be his life^c—As Lazarus when raised was enabled to perform the functions of animal life, of which he had been rendered, for a season, incapable, so shall the believer’s soul, which was once dead in trespasses and sins, be quickened to the discharge of all the duties and offices of the spiritual life—It shall enjoy sweet communion with God in secret, and find its supreme delight in fulfilling his blessed will—How unspeakable is such a benefit!—How much happier must such a man be than one who lives without God in the world!—]

Eternal life

[The man who daily comes to Christ for righteousness and strength is incomparably the happiest man on earth—But

^a This may perhaps be more clearly understood by expressing the very words and manner in which a sinner comes to Christ—“O my Lord and Saviour, behold I am vile, and justly deserve to be for ever spurned from thy footstool, &c. But thou hast died for sinners, even the chief, &c. I have no hope but in thee, &c. O receive a poor prodigal, &c. I look for redemption through thy blood; O let thy blood cleanse me from all sin, &c. And while I trust in thy name, enable me to depart from all iniquity, &c. Be thou my only Lord, and let every thought and desire of my heart be brought into captivity to thy holy will, &c.”—

^b 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^c John x. 10.

^d Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 1.

his happiness does not terminate with his present existence—He goes to regions of everlasting blessedness—Believer, thou hast a never-fading crown of righteousness and glory awaiting thee at thy departure hence—What a recompence is this of all thy labour!—What encouragement to come continually to Christ does such a prospect afford thee!—]

One would suppose that all should be pressing toward the Saviour with their whole hearts—Let us then proceed to enquire

II. Whence is it that any fall short of these blessings?

The reason assigned in the text is the most just and most humiliating of any—There is no unwillingness in Christ to save us, but we are unwilling to go to him for salvation.

1. We are indifferent about life

[We consider all pretensions to a new and *spiritual life* as enthusiasm—And therefore disdain to apply to Christ for it—As for *eternal life*, we do not wish to hear any thing about it—if the prospect of temporal advancement be held out to us, we can cheerfully and intensely bend our minds to the attainment of it—but if heaven and all its glory be offered us, we slight it utterly—we choose to talk of any subject rather than religion—and universally agree to banish that from our conversation—if at any time the thought of eternity be obtruded upon us, we turn from it with disgust; and are uneasy till some other topic be brought forward—even in the house of God we hear of heavenly things as if they were fabulous and unworthy of our attention—we love our own ways, though they will end in death; and will not endure to be told of heaven, because we cannot reconcile our minds to the way that leads thither—to this effect is that declaration of Christ, They that hate me, love death^e]—]

2. We are averse to the way in which alone it is to be obtained

[We will not *come to Christ* for life—This appears to be *too humiliating*—If we could obtain life by any works of our own, we would gladly do them—but we cannot bear to be so entirely indebted to another—we do not choose to acknowledge ourselves lost and undone—we hope to establish some righteousness of our own—Hence we neither do, nor will, come to Christ for life and salvation—Besides, this way to life is *too strict*—As we do not like to come with humility, and

^e Prov. viii. 34, 35.

faith, so neither do we feel that love, which will instigate us to devote ourselves unreservedly to his service—We think that less religion will suffice—And are determined to perish, rather than endure such drudgery—In every ungodly sinner are the words of our Saviour verified, “How often woud I, but ye would not”^f]—]

INFER

1. What ground for self-condemnation will there be in the day of judgment!

[Every condemned sinner, however full of excuses now, will then have his mouth shut—He will see that his condemnation was the effect of his own obstinacy—]

2. What astonishing grace and mercy are there in the Lord Jesus Christ!

[His reproof contains in it a most gracious invitation—He addresses all of us at this instant, Come unto me and I will give you life^g—Let none resist him any longer—Let us go to him and he will in no wise cast us out^h]—

^f Matt. xxiii. 37.

^g Matt. xi. 28.

^h John vi. 37.

CCCLXII. THE NEARNESS OF ETERNITY.

Rev. x. 5, 6. *The angel which I saw stand upon the sea, and upon the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever * * * * that there should be time no longer.*

NEVER was there a more beautiful instance of descriptive imagery than that before us. In ver. 1. a mighty angel (probably the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ) is represented as coming from heaven to make known to the beloved disciple the purposes and decrees of God. His *vesture* was a cloud, which intimated that, “clouds and darkness being round about him,” neither his person nor his message could be fully known. His *face* shone as the brightness of the meridian sun, which denoted his transcendent excellency and glory; while a rainbow, intimating his faithfulness to all his covenant-engagements, encircled his *head* as a royal diadem. His *feet* were as pillars of fire, marking at once his immove-

able firmness, and irresistible power. His *posture* was such as became his august appearance, and the solemn embassy on which he was come: he set his feet, the one on the earth, and the other on the sea, expressing thereby his sovereign dominion over the whole universe. In this situation he cried with a loud *voice*, like the roaring of a lion: upon which seven thunders, like a responsive echo, uttered their voices. The attention of the whole creation being thus deeply fixed, this glorious Personage, in the manner of those who appeal to God, lifted up his *hand*, and sware by him who liveth for ever and ever, even by the Creator of heaven and earth: and that which he thus solemnly affirmed with an oath, was, that there should be time no longer.

Commentators understand this oath in different ways. Some think it relates to the introduction of the millennium; others, to the commencement of the eternal state. The whole period fixed for the reign of antichrist was 1260 years, or, in the language of prophecy, “a time, and times, and half a time:” and the oath declares, that the power of antichrist shall continue no longer than to that precise period; and that then the end of the world (as some think) or the happy state of the church (which is the more probable opinion) shall succeed. But without entering into this question, the words, in whichever way they be understood, will furnish us with this important observation, that,

OUR TIMES ARE IN GOD'S HANDS.

That God has fixed the duration of the world itself, and the limits of every man's existence in it, is a truth so evident, that it is needless to dwell long upon the proof of it.* But to get it suitably impressed upon our minds, is a work of great difficulty, and worthy of our united attention. To promote this end, let the following considerations be laid to heart.

**I. If God has fixed the period of our existence here,
it is impossible for us to prolong it.**

[*No strength of constitution* can withstand the stroke of death^b — — — *No physician's skill* can administer either anti-

^a See Job xiv. 14. and vii. 1. and xiv. 5.

^b Job xxi. 18, 23—26.

dote or cure^c— — — *No friends or relatives can procure one moment's respite^d*— — — *Nor shall any want of preparation in us avail for the lengthening out of our appointed time^e*— — — If God has said, “ This night shall thy soul be required of thee,” even though we retired to our bed in perfect health, we should never behold the morning light.^f]

II. When the period fixed for our existence here shall arrive, *there will be an end of all present things*

[All our earthly connexions will be dissolved^g— — — All our plans and purposes will be broken^h— — — All our opportunities of spiritual improvement will for ever ceaseⁱ— — —]

III. When the appointed moment shall come, *our eternal state will be irrevocably fixed*

^c They are extremely useful as *God's instruments* to effect his will: but they cannot in any instance counteract it. The monarch as well as the beggar must obey the summons of his God.

^d They may cry till their throats are dry, their eyes are bated, and their very hearts break with sorrow; but death, that relentless messenger, will be deaf to their intreaties; and inflict the stroke on the devoted victim.

^e We may be living securely and without thought; or be intending soon to reform our lives; or be professors of religion in a back-slidden state, and hoping for a season of revival; but no regard will be paid to our unfitness for death: yea rather, that very circumstance may be God's reason for removing us without a moment's warning. Matt. xxiv. 48—51. 1 Thess. v. 2, 3. ^f Luke xii. 20.

^g We shall no more rejoice in the wife of our youth, or fondle in our arms our infant offspring, or enjoy the friend that is as our own soul: every social tie will be cut asunder, and every gratification of sense be taken from us.

^h If we were forming vast and comprehensive plans for our own personal benefit, or the good of the state, and had almost brought them to maturity; if we were just on the eve of renouncing our earthly and carnal lusts in order to turn more fully unto God; if we were in the very act of determining to read our bible, to attend ordinances, and to devote ourselves to God; all would be frustrated the very instant that our time was come. Ps. cxlvi. 4.

ⁱ All things are ready for us *now*: the Holy Spirit is ready to teach us, Christ to cleanse us, and the Father to accept us: ministers are ready to lead us, angels to welcome us, the oxen and fatlings to feast us, and all the promises to own us as their lawful heir. But, as soon as the last sand of our glass is fallen, all will be passed and gone. There will be no more ordinances to instruct; or promises to encourage, or pastors to guide, or drawings of God's Spirit to incline us: the fountain of Christ's blood will be forever closed; the bowels of divine mercy will yearn over us no more; nor will the angels any more tender us their friendly services. The day once ended, we can work no more for ever.

[There will be no change whatever in the grave^k— — — They who die without an interest in Christ will be for ever miserable!— — — They who have improved their time for the great ends and purposes of life, will be for ever happy in the presence of their God^m— — —]

REFLECTIONS

1. This very day or night may be our last

[Yes; if the term of our continuance on earth be now to expire, we cannot resist the divine will; we must go: but whither? Can it be to the regions of the damned? O how shall we dwell with everlasting burnings?ⁿ Is there reason to hope that we should go to heaven? then welcome sickness! welcome death! But let us not rest one moment while this awful matter is in suspense.]

2. Our last day must come soon at all events

[What if we live fifty or sixty years? the time will soon be gone, as a weaver's shuttle passing through the loom;^o and then the thread of life will be cut. They who are now advanced in years, look back upon their past life as a dream. So will it appear to us also, when it is spent. Let us then work while it is day; and before the night comes, in which no man can work.^p]

3. The present moment is of infinite importance to us all

[It is all that we can call our own: and on this eternity depends. Let us therefore live as those who live for eternity.^q If ever we should be with Christ in Paradise, shall we regret that we took so much pains to get thither? If, on the contrary, we should ever lift up our eyes in hell, shall we not bewail the supineness that brought us thither? Let us then

^k Eccl. ix. 10. Whatever our real character was in death, such it will remain, Rev. xxii. 11. just as Babel remained, from the instant that God confounded the languages of the builders.

^l There was an impassable gulf fixed between the rich man and Lazarus: nor was there so much as the smallest mitigation of pain allowed to him that was in hell. Luke xvi. 26. Rev. xiv. 10, 14. As on Noah's entrance into the ark the door was shut; so there will remain no possibility of admission into heaven, if once we die without an interest in Christ.

^m They shall be as pillars in the temple of their God, and shall go no more out. Rev. iii. 12. and iv. 8. and vii. 15.

ⁿ Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

^o Job vii. 6.

^p John ix. 4.

^q 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

awake from our slumbers; and labour, that, at whatever time our Lord may come, he may find us watching*.]

* Much of the foregoing matter would serve to illustrate ANOTHER TEXT, Jer. xxviii. 16. *This year thou shalt die.* It might be treated thus: 1. What prospect there is that the text will be fulfilled in us (Many will die this year—No one has any security that he himself shall not be among the number—We all feel in ourselves the seeds of death—Many who in all respects were as likely to live as we, are dead already—There is a year coming wherein every one of us *must die*) 2. What effect that prospect should have upon us (It should make us, dead to the world—serious in self-examination—Diligent in working out our salvation.)

CCCLXIII. THE COMMONNESS AND FOLLY OF ATHEISM.

Ps. xiv. 1. *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*

MEN, who judge only by the outward appearance, are apt to entertain a good opinion of themselves: but God who looketh at the heart, describes the whole race of mankind as immersed in an unfathomable abyss of wickedness—In confirmation of this melancholy truth we need look no further than to the declaration in the text—It may be thought indeed that the text is spoken only in reference to a few professed infidels: but the words immediately following shew that it relates to many, yea to all mankind; “all being gone aside, and none doing good, no not one”—Above all, St. Paul, expressly upon the subject of human depravity, appeals to this very passage as decisively establishing that doctrine^b—In considering the words before us we shall shew

I. The atheistical thoughts and desires of the heart

God interprets the thoughts and desires of the heart as though they were expressed in words; and he attests its real language to be like that in the text—It may be understood

1. As an assertion

[The name here used for God is not *Jehovah*, which relates to his essence, but *Elohim*, which characterizes him as the

^a Jer. xvii. 9.

^b Rom. iii. 10—12.

moral governor of the world—The words therefore must be understood, not as declaring that there is no God, but that there is no God who interferes in human affairs—It is true there are not many, who will deliberately affirm this in plain terms; but, alas! how many are there, whose actions manifest this to be the inward thought of their hearts!—If we look around us, we shall see the great mass of mankind living as if there were no superior being to whom they owed obedience, or to whom they were accountable for their conduct—They enquire constantly whether such or such a line of conduct will tend to their comfort, their honour, or their interest; but how rarely do they examine whether it will please God! How will men gratify in secret, or at least harbour in their bosoms, those lusts, which they could not endure to have exposed to the eye of a fellow-creature, while yet they feel no concern at all about the presence of their God!—The language of their hearts is, “The Lord seeth us not, he hath forsaken the earth:” “How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of the heaven,”^d ignorant and indifferent about the affairs of men—And as we thus refuse to acknowledge God ourselves, so we do not choose that any others should acknowledge him—Is any one of our companions awed by the fear of God? how ready are we to laugh at his scruples; to propose to him the customs and maxims of the world as more worthy of his regard than the mind and will of God; and to encourage him in the hope, that such compliances shall never be noticed in the day of judgment!—And what is this but to use the very language which God imputes to us, “The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil?”^e]]

2. As a wish

[The words “There is” are not in the original, and may therefore be omitted: the text will then stand thus; The fool hath said in his heart, No God! that is, I wish there were none—And how common a wish is this!—When men are fully convinced in their minds that God notices every transaction of their lives, and records it in the book of his remembrance, they are still unwilling to give up their lusts, and determined to continue in sin at all events—But are they easy in such a state? No: they shrink back at the prospect of death and judgment, and wish that they could elude the summons that will be given them in the last day—Gladly would they sleep an eternal sleep, and barter their immortality for an exemption from appearing at the tribunal of God—What satisfaction would they feel if they could be certified on unquestionable grounds, that God did not notice their actions, or

^c Ezek. viii. 12.

^d Job xxiii. 13, 14.

^e Zeph. i. 12.

that, notwithstanding he be the Governor and Judge of all, he hath decreed to bestow on them the favour of annihilation!—Instantly they would exclaim, Now I may dismiss my fears: now I may take my fill of pleasure; and “drink iniquity like water,” without any dread of future consequences—We may appeal to the consciences of all, whether such have not been frequently the thoughts of their hearts, or, at least, whether their dread of death and judgment do not justly admit of this construction?—]

Such being the thoughts and desires of the heart, we proceed to shew

II. The folly of entertaining them

This will appear in a striking point of view, if we consider

1. The thing wished for is absolutely impossible

[God can no more cease to inspect the ways of men with a view to a final retribution, than he can cease to exist—As his superintending care is necessary for the perservation of the universe, so the continual exercise of his moral government is necessary for the vindication of his own honour—How absurd then is it to indulge a wish, when it is not possible for that wish ever to be gratified, and when the indulging of it makes us act as though it would be gratified!—How much better were it to say at once, There is a God, and I *must* fear him; there is a judgment, and I *must* prepare for it!—]

2. If the wish could be obtained, it would be an unspeakable injury to all in this world

[Men are led even by the saintest hopes of impunity, to live in sin; and how much more would they yield themselves up to its dominion, if they could once be sure that God would never call them into judgment for it!—This, *as it respects individuals*, would greatly embitter this present life—The gratification of their lusts would indeed afford them a transient pleasure: but who that considers how soon such enjoyments cloy; who that knows how many evils they bring in their train; who that has seen the effects of unbridled passions, of pride, envy, wrath, malice, of lewdness, covetousness, or any other inordinate affection; who that has the least knowledge of these things can doubt, but that sin and misery are indissolubly connected, and that, in proportion as we give the rein to appetite, we undermine our own happiness?—And what would be the consequence to *the community at large*?—Men even now “bite and devour one another” like wild beasts, the very instant that God withdraws his restraint from them!—It is he alone, who overruled the pur-

poses of a lewd Abimelech, a covetous Laban, and a revengeful Esau, that keeps the world in any measure of peace and quiet—And if once it were bereft of his providence, it would instantly resemble that world, where the dispositions of men are suffered to rage without control, and incessantly to torment themselves, and all around them—Is it not then the extremest folly to entertain a wish, that would involve in it such tremendous consequences?—]

3. It would be productive of still greater evil as it respects the world to come

[Doubtless, if there were no moral governor of the universe, there would be no fear of hell; and the thought of this would be a great acquisition to ungodly men—But they, on the other hand, entertain no hope of heaven; their brightest prospect would be, annihilation—Melancholy prospect indeed!—How much better even for the most ungodly to have a God to flee unto; a God to pardon their iniquities; a God to sanctify and renew their souls; a God to bless them with immortality and glory!—They need not to wish for the cessation of his agency, or the extinction of their own existence, seeing that he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him, and ready to receive returning prodigals—And is it not for the interest of all that there should be such a God?—Is not the prospect of obtaining his favour, and participating his glory, better than annihilation, more especially when the terms of our acceptance with him are so easy?—He requires nothing but that we should humble ourselves before him, and plead the merits of his dear Son, and renounce the ways that have been displeasing to him: the very instant we return to him in this manner, he will “cast all our sins into the depth of the sea,” and embrace us with the arms of his mercy—What madness then to wish that there were no such being!—]

INFER

1. How great is the patience of God!

[God sees, not one only or even many, but all the world living without God,^f banishing him from their thoughts,^g and from the universe: yet he not only bears with them, but follows them with invitations, and promises, and waiteth to be gracious unto them——Let us stand amazed at his goodness: and let it lead us to repentance——]

2. How glorious is the change that takes place in conversion!

[Grace no sooner enters into the heart than it slays this

^f Eph. ii. 12.

^g Ps. x. 4.

enmity, and reconciles the sinner to God—Henceforth it becomes his one desire to walk with God, to enjoy his presence, to fulfil his will, and to live in the near prospect of participating his glory——How enviable is such a state! Let us seek it with our whole hearts—]

CCCLXIV. THE SHAMEFULNESS OF BEING IGNORANT OF GOD.

1 Cor. xv. 34. Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

KNOWLEDGE is the foundation of all acceptable obedience. We must know whom we are to serve; and why we are to serve him; and what are the services that he requires at our hands. Hence the scriptures represent us first as “renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us.”^a On the other hand, ignorance is the root of all sin. It was to this, as its proper source, that our Saviour and his apostles traced the wickedness of the Jews in crucifying the Lord of glory, and in persecuting his followers.^b To this also St. Paul referred the conduct of those at Corinth who taught that “there was no resurrection of the dead.” From their erroneous views of this fundamental doctrine, and the consequent sinfulness of their conduct, he was sure that they were ignorant of God himself; and therefore he declared it to their shame,

The same may be said in reference to ourselves, if we err in any other fundamental point of faith or practice. In order therefore to bring it home to ourselves, we shall shew

I. What is implied in the knowledge of God

The knowledge of God may be considered as residing in the head, and in the heart: in the former sense, it comprehends a speculative view of his nature and attri-

^a Col. iii. 10.

^b John xvi. 3. Acts iii. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 8.

butes; in the latter, it includes a practical and experimental acquaintance with them. Both of these are implied in the text, the one as the foundation; the other as the superstructure raised upon it.

1. A speculative view of God's perfections

[The almighty power and godhead of Jehovah may be seen by the heathen in the works of creation. But the Bible gives us a more distinct and enlarged view of his attributes. In that we behold his inflexible justice, his unspotted holiness, his unbounded mercy, his inviolable truth: yea, we behold every perfection harmonizing in the work of redemption, and shining with united splendor in the person of Christ: or, to use the language of St. Paul, we behold "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."]

Now though all true Christians have not this view of the Deity in such a clear manner as to be able to set it forth for the instruction of others, yet all see that he is a just and holy God, a merciful and faithful God, and that, through the atonement of Christ, all these perfections are engaged on the side of a believing penitent.]

2. An experimental acquaintance with them

[A speculative knowledge, however, is far from being the whole that is implied in the text; for even devils have that, and perhaps in a far higher degree than any human being. But though they know God, they cannot love him: they see his holiness, and hate it; his justice, and tremble at it; his power, and lament it; his mercy, and despair of it; his grace, and oppose it; his wisdom, and endeavour to counteract it. The Christian, on the contrary, finds his supreme delight in the perfections of his God: for though he, *in himself*, has as much cause to hate them all, as the devils themselves have, yet, *in Christ*, they are all rendered favourable to him; and therefore may well be grounds of joy and glorying. Hence even divine justice itself is no less the object of his delight than divine Mercy; because God, having received a full satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, is now "just to forgive us our sins;"^c he is "just, and yet the justifier of all that believe."^d In short, the Christian, both in his views of God's perfections, and in his improvement of them, accords with David.^e]

Having ascertained this point, we may proceed with more certainty and advantage to shew

^c 1 John i. 9.

^d Rom. iii. 26.

^e Ps. xxxvi. 5—9.

II. Who they are that have not this knowledge

It is not necessary that we should deny that particular truth which those at Corinth denied: we are equally ignorant of God,

1. If we reject any fundamental doctrine of the gospel

[There are points whereon the best of men have differed, and may differ without any impeachment of their sincerity. But there are other points which no man can deny without making void the whole of the gospel scheme. The lost state of man by nature, his recovery through Christ, and his need of divine influences in order to enlighten and sanctify his soul, are doctrines, on which all true Christians are, and must be, agreed: and a denial of any one of them would betray an ignorance of God himself; because it would shew an ignorance of that revelation which he has given of himself in the person of Christ.]

They who reasoned away the doctrine of the resurrection, and persuaded men it was only figurative and had passed already, might think the Apostle deficient in candour for his assertion respecting them. But it was true of them, and is equally true of unbelievers in our day, that they had not the knowledge of God.]

2. If we allowedly violate any precept of the gospel

[What knowledge of God's majesty and glory can they have, who *sin openly*, and "count it pleasure to riot in the day-time;" or, though free from gross outward sins, are decided "friends of the world," and "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God?" And what knowledge can they have of God as a holy, just, omniscient, and almighty-being, who dare to indulge *secret sins*, whether of omission or of commission? Would they venture to do it, if they were verily persuaded that "all things are naked and open before him," and that "he will bring every secret thing into judgment?" St. John determines this point for us, by making it, both in a negative and positive view, the criterion whereby we are to judge: "Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments:"^f and again, "Whosoever saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar."^g]

Ignorance of this kind is not branded with infamy by

^f 1 John ii. 2.

^g Ib. ver. 4.

the world; but it is by St. Paul; and *that* justly; as will appear while we consider

III. Why is it a shame not to have this knowledge

Of many things we may all be ignorant without any imputation on our character. But to be destitute of the knowledge of God is a shame to all, because it is

1. The most excellent of all knowledge

[The knowledge of philosophy is a very valuable acquisition; but it is not to be compared with the knowledge of God, since *that* infinitely surpasses every thing that can occupy the human mind. How glorious is it for a worm of the earth to see the perfections of the invisible God! to behold them all shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ! and, above all, to see them all interested in his salvation? How glorious is it for a helpless sinner to know that he has omnipotence for his support, and unbounded mercy for his refuge! How glorious is it for such an unworthy creature to survey the justice and holiness, the power and wisdom, the love and mercy, the truth and faithfulness of God, and then to say, "This God is *my* God for ever and ever!"^h Surely every thing else in comparison of this is lighter than vanity itself. And whoever seeks any other knowledge in preference to this, has reason to blush for his stupidity, and to be ashamed of his choice.]

2. The most needful of all knowledge

[The knowledge of trade, and of politics, is necessary for the welfare of a state: but a statesman need not be conversant with the lowest branches of trade; nor need a tradesman know how to govern a state—But the knowledge of God is every man's business; it is that for which God has brought him into existence, and for which the ordinances of the gospel are continued to him. Every man is more interested in this, than even in providing bread for his body: for he may have food supplied to him by the benevolence of others; but who can supply the lack of this knowledge, or what substitute can be found for it? Without *that* a man can have no *happiness*; because till he has it, he is exposed to the wrath of almighty God. Without *that* he can have no *holiness*; because holiness is the fruit that springs from it, and therefore cannot subsist without it. Without *that* he can have no *salvation*; for "to know God and Christ is eternal life;"ⁱ and when Christ shall come to judgment, it will be for the express purpose of

^h Ps. xlvi. 14.

ⁱ John xvii. 3.

"taking vengeance on them that know not God."^k If then it be a shame to be destitute of all good, and to be a miserable outcast from heaven, it is a shame to be ignorant of God.]

3. The most easy to be obtained of all knowledge

[There are many things which men have not a capacity to learn. But even the weakest of men may attain the knowledge of God, if they will seek it in God's appointed way. Our Lord returns thanks to his heavenly Father on this very account, "because the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes."^l Nor is this expression merely figurative; for Samuel, Josiah, Timothy, and John are standing monuments to the church, that "God will ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings."^m In reference to this knowledge then, no man has any excuse for his ignorance; no man can say, "I am no scholar, and therefore have no reason to be ashamed;" for all *may* know the Lord, if they will seek the enlightening influences of his Spirit, since God has pledged himself, that "if *any* man lack wisdom, and ask it of him, he will give it liberally, and without upbraiding."ⁿ]

APPLICATION

[Let *those who know not God* as reconciled to them in Christ Jesus, begin to seek that knowledge without delay. And let *those who do know him*, give God the glory: for though an ignorance of him is to *our shame*, the honour arising from this distinction, belongs to *God alone*; since it is "*he who has given us an understanding to know him.*"^o]

^k 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^l Matt. xi. 25.

^m Ps. viii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 16.

ⁿ James i. 5.

^o 1 John v. 20.

CCCLXV. THE DANGER OF SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Hos. iii. 17. *Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.*

THERE is a day of grace, wherein God strives with men by his Spirit

This past, he abandons them to impenitence and obduracy^a—

^a Luke xix. 42.

The precise period of its termination is, in mercy, concealed from us.

But we are all concerned to deprecate the judgment denounced against Ephraim in the text—

I. The sin of Ephraim

Ephraim, to which Jeroboam belonged, comprehends all the ten tribes—

These were devoted to the worship of the idols that were in Dan and Bethel—

Nor could they be drawn from it by any of the means which God used—

Though we do not imitate them in this, we are not free from *spiritual idolatry*—

[Idolatry is described to be a loving and serving of the creature more than the Creator—]

Hence covetousness and sensuality are spoken of under that term^b—

Now who has not yielded that love, fear, and confidence to the creature, which are due to God alone?—“Who can say, I am pure from this sin?”———]

We have, in truth, been “joined” to idols

[Many are the means which God has used to bring us to himself—]

Yet we have not been wrought upon effectually by any of them—

Neither mercies vouchsafed, nor judgments threatened, have been able to prevail—

We rather have “held fast deceit, and refused to return to the Lord our God”———]

But this sin must of necessity provoke God to anger

II. Their punishment

The text may be understood as an advice to Judah, not to hold intercourse with the idolatrous Israelites—

Our Lord gives a similar direction to his followers^c—

But it rather imports a judicial sentence of final dereliction—

[This is a just punishment for turning away from God—

^b Rom. i. 25.

^c Jer. viii. 5, and xliv. 16, 17.

^d Col. iii. 5. Phil. iii. 19.

^e Matt. xv. 14.

Nor can there be a more awful punishment inflicted even by God himself—

It is worse than the severest afflictions which can come upon us in this life—

For *they* may lead to the salvation of the soul;^f whereas *this* must terminate in our condemnation—

It is worse than even immediate death and immediate damnation—

For the greater our load of sin, the greater will be our treasure of wrath^g]—

And their is reason to fear that God may inflict this punishment upon *us*

[In this way he punished the Gentiles who sinned against their light^h—

In this way he visited also his once favoured people the Jewsⁱ—

Why then should we hope for an exemption, if we imitate their conduct?—

God has repeatedly warned us that impenitent sinners shall have this doom^k]—

INFER

1. What reason have we to admire the patience and forbearance of God!

[He has seen us cleaving to idols from the earliest period of our lives^l—

And though we have changed *them*, we have never turned unto *him*—

In the mean time we have been deaf to all his expostulations and intreaties—

What a mercy is it that he has never yet said, “Let him alone!”—

Yea, he has even restrained us from perpetrating all that was in our hearts^m—

How gracious is he in yet striving with us by his Spirit!—

Let then his goodness, patience and forbearance lead us to repentanceⁿ—

And let us say, like Ephraim, in their repenting state^o]—

^f 1 Cor. xi. 32. and v. 5.

^g Rom. ii. 5.

^h Thrice mentioned, Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxi. 12. Matt. xxiii. 32—35.

^k Prov. i. 30, 31. and v. 22. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^l Ezek. xiv. 3. ^m Gen. xx. 6. and xxxi. 29. 1 Sam. xxv. 34.

ⁿ Rom. ii. 4. ^o Hos. xiv. 8.

2. How evidently is salvation entirely of grace!

[If left to ourselves we never should renounce our idols^p—

We should act rather like that obstinate and rebellious people^q—

The case of Judas may shew us what we *may* do, when once abandoned by God—

God must give us a will, as well as an ability, to turn to him^r—

Let us then intreat him never to leave us to ourselves—

Let us be thankful if, in any way, he rend our idols from us—

If we have never yet resembled the Thessalonian converts,^s let us now cry unto him^t—

If we have, let us bear in mind that affectionate exhortation^u—

^p Jer. xiii. 23.

^q Zech. vii. 11, 12.

^r Phil. ii. 13.

^s 1 Thess. i. 9.

^t Jer. xxxi. 18. Hos. xiv. 2, 3.

^u 1 John v. 21.

CCCLXVI. AN ENQUIRY INTO THE REALITY AND DEGREE OF OUR FAITH.

John xvi. 31. *Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*

THE meekness and gentleness of Christ were manifested on all occasions—Even his reproofs were tempered with inexpressible kindness, and fully justified the description given of him by the Prophet, “He shall not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax”—He had been speaking plainly about his departure from the world: and his disciples, understanding him somewhat better than before, were now confident that they believed in him. But he, knowing the very low state of their attainments, mildly reproved their mistaken confidence, and warned them of the sad discovery which they would shortly make of their unbelief—The mode in which our Lord put the question to them was very significant: its force will, in a measure, appear while we

I. Shew what was implied in the question put to the disciples

If we consider the question in connexion with the foregoing and following context, it will be found to contain several important truths

1. That many think they believe, when they are wholly destitute of faith

[The nature of faith is very little understood—It is generally supposed to be a mere assent to the gospel as true; whereas it is a living operative principle, infused into the soul by the Holy Ghost^a—From these mistaken views of faith every one of course conceives himself to be a believer—The worldling, the self-righteous Pharisee, the sensualist, yea all, except avowed infidels, lay claim to this appellation; and, while they acknowledge themselves to need correction with respect to morals, have no idea at all that they need instruction with respect to their faith— — — This self-deception universally obtained among the unconverted Jews, who “*trusted in Moses*,” not doubting but that they believed his writings, though they shewed by their rejection of Christ, that they did not believe them:^b and too much of the same spirit yet manifested itself in those who had become the stated followers of our Lord—]

2. That many, who have some faith, are yet much under the influence of unbelief

[As for unregenerate men, they have no faith at all, no, not even in the plainest truths of our religion; for though they assent to many truths, they feel not the force, nor experience the vital influence, of any—Nor, when faith is imparted to the soul, is unbelief altogether eradicated; yea, it will be well if the natural principle do not, in many and very alarming instances, overcome the new-created principle, which ought to govern the whole man— — — Thus it was with the apostles in the passage before us: our Lord acknowledges that they were true believers;^c but intimates that they would soon manifest, by their dereliction of him, how weak and insufficient their faith at present was—And thus it is with all, though in different degrees, till they have been taught and disciplined in the school of Christ—]

3. That heavy trials will discover the state of our souls with respect to faith

[Affliction is a touchstone whereby all our graces, and especially our faith, may be tried—if our faith be strong, we shall approve ourselves to God under the most arduous circumstances: if it be weak, we shall be ready to faint at the

^a Phil. i. 29. ^b John v. 45—47. ^c Gal. v. 17. ^d Ver. 27.

approach of any dangers we fear,^e and to adopt sinful methods of attaining any ends we desire^f—If we have nothing but a false faith, we shall “make shipwreck both of it and of a good conscience” as soon as ever we are brought into any storms of difficulty and temptation: if our troubles be of a spiritual nature, we shall flee from God, and reject his grace;^g or if they arise from temporal things, we shall be offended with God, and condemn his providence—For the effects of weak faith we need look no further than to the passage before us—The immediate scope of our Lord’s question was, to put his disciples on their guard against their remaining unbelief; and, by warning them of their approaching fall, to encourage and facilitate their speedy recovery—And we may learn from their example that, if our faith be not increased in proportion to our trials, we shall surely faint in the day of adversity—]

If such truths be implied in the interrogation before us, we may well

II. Urge you to put the same question to yourselves

We are particularly exhorted to “examine ourselves whether we be in the faith.”^h Let all of us then enquire into

1. The reality of our faith

[Before we conclude too confidently that we are believers, we should ask ourselves, *Whence we obtained our faith?* It is not a plant of Nature’s growth; nor is it formed in us by human teaching—There is but one way in which it ever is or can be obtained, namely, by acknowledging our unbelief before God, and imploring him to create a lively faith in our hearts by his blessed Spirit—If we have never been “convinced of unbelief,” we have not yet one grain of real faith—But if this enquiry be satisfactorily answered, we should further ask, *How our faith operates?* If it be genuine and scriptural, it will overcome the world, and work by love, and purify the heart^k—But has it these effects?—We are warned by God that “all men have not faith;”^l nor should we conclude that we have, unless we manifest it in its fruits—]

2. The degree of our faith

[If we cannot ascertain precisely the degree of our faith, we yet have grounds whereon we may form some estimate—

^e Matt. xiv. 30, 31.

^f Gen. xxvii. 6—10.

^g Gen. iii. 8.

^h 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

ⁱ John xvi. 8, 9.

^k 1 John v. 4. Gal. v. 6. Acts xv. 9.

^l 2 Thess. iii. 2.

Are we enabled to realize the things which are invisible? This is a very principal office of faith; and in proportion as we are enabled to set God before our eyes, and to keep heaven in view, we may safely conclude that we have that principle, which alone can produce this effect—*Do we maintain our hope under discouraging circumstances?* This was the mark whereby the strength of Abraham's faith was so fully known:^m and, if we be strong in faith, we shall be steadfast under heavy and long-protracted trials, and “against hope believe in hope”—*Are we kept diligent in the way of duty?* It is presumption, and not faith, that leads us to relax our diligence in the use of means: the more faith we have, the greater will be our activity in every good workⁿ—The various offices of faith are fully delineated in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews: and by comparing our spirit and conduct with that of the saints there mentioned, we may weigh ourselves in the balance of the sanctuary—In this way we may provide an answer to the interrogation in the text; and, instead of boasting as though we had attained, shall learn to reply, “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief”—]

APPLICATION

[Trials must ere long come upon every soul amongst us: and then nothing but faith will support us^o—And even now if our graces be examined, it will be found that our progress has been in exact proportion to our faith—Let us then pray with the apostles, “Lord, increase our faith; that through it we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand”—]

^m Rom. iv. 18—20.

ⁿ 1 Thess. i. 3.

^o 1 Pet. i. 5—7.

CCCLXVII. THE FOLLY OF UNBELIEF.

Rom. iii. 3, 4. *What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.*

IN every age of the world man has been prone to disbelieve the testimony of God: our first parents fell by questioning the prohibition which God had given them, and doubting the penalty with which it was enforced. Their posterity, born in their fallen image, have but too faithfully copied their example. By unbelief, the ante-

diluvian world were overwhelmed: by unbelief, God's chosen people the Jews have been spoiled of all their privileges. The same malignant principle pervades also the Christian church. We profess indeed, like the Jews of old, to venerate the sacred oracles; but there is scarcely a truth contained in them, which is not practically, and almost universally, denied. Yet is this no reason for questioning their divine authority: for God is as immutable in his word, as he is in his nature; and, as his existence would not be affected, though the whole world should be atheists, so neither will one jot or tittle of his word fail, though the whole world should be infidels. This is the very point on which St. Paul is insisting in the passage before us. Having observed that the Jews were highly privileged in having the oracles of God committed to them, he anticipates the objection which might be urged against him from their unbelief; and allowing the truth of the fact, That they were very generally disbelieved, he denies and refutes the inference that might be drawn from it, by declaring, That their unbelief, however general it might be, could never invalidate the truth of God.

From his words we shall be led to consider

I. The prevalence of unbelief

It is not our intention to expose the errors of infidelity, or the sophistry with which the truth of God has been assailed; but rather to point out that secret unbelief, which works in the minds of all, even with respect to the most acknowledged truths. That such unbelief prevails, cannot possibly be doubted, if we observe,

1. How general is men's neglect of the word of God

[The sacred volume lies by us: we have it in our own language, that all may read it; and it is stately read and explained to us in public. But how few study it! how few regard it! how few are there who do not give a decided, yea, an exclusive preference to books of human science, and even to any worthless novel, or ephemeral compilation! and what is the cause of this? Could they be thus indifferent, if they believed it to be the word of God; the word of God to *them*? Would any one manifest such indifference towards a will in which he was informed that great estates were bequeathed to him? or even towards a map, which would shew him his way

through a trackless desert? How much less then would any disregard the holy scriptures, if they really believed them to be the charter of their privileges, and the only sure directory to heaven! They would rather account them more precious than gold, and esteem them more than their necessary food.]

2. What contempt men discover for the truths they do hear

[Men hear that there is such a place as heaven, where the saints shall live in everlasting felicity; and such a place as hell, where the wicked shall lie down in everlasting burnings: yet are they neither allured, nor alarmed. When the ministers of God insist on these subjects, they are considered only as preaching "cunningly devised fables." But could this be the case, if men believed the testimony of God? Do men feel no emotion at the news of some unexpected benefit arising to them, or some unforeseen calamity impending over them? Do men treat with contempt a sentence of condemnation, or a notice of reprieve? How then could men so disregard the things revealed in the gospel, if they believed them to be the very truths of God?]

3. How men expect things in direct opposition to the word of God

[Unconverted men will as confidently expect to go to heaven, as if the word of God were altogether on their side. The drunkard, the swearer, the sabbath-breaker, the whoremonger are as persuaded that they shall never come into condemnation, as if there were not one word in all the book of God that declared the contrary. They will never believe that the wrath of God is revealed against such sins as theirs, notwithstanding God so positively declares, that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God."^b They do not indeed imagine that any will be finally lost. They can hear of thousands slain in battle, and yet extend their thoughts no further than the grave. The idea that multitudes of them may possibly have died in their sins, and been consigned over to endless misery, seems so harsh, that they cannot harbour it in their minds one moment, notwithstanding God expressly says, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."^c Could all this be so, if they believed the word of God? Would not their sentiments then be more conformed to it? Would they not be assured, that, however "it should be well with the righteous," it must and should "go ill with the wicked?"^d]—

^a Ps. cxix. 72. Job xxiii. 12.

^b 1 Cor. vi. 9.

^c Ps. ix. 17.

^d Isaiah vii. 10, 11.

4. How little men are influenced by the things they profess most to believe

[They profess to believe that there is a God: yet they do not love him, or fear him, or trust in him, or regard him, any more than if there were no such Being. They profess to believe that they have an immortal soul; yet they pay no more attention to its interests, than if it were not to survive the body. They profess to believe that there will be a day of judgment, wherein they shall give account of themselves to God: yet they are not at all solicitous to know how their account stands; they bestow no pains in preparing for that day; they presume that others are happy, and that *they* shall fare as well as those who have gone before them; and thus they hazard their eternal welfare on a mere groundless surmise. They profess to believe that death will put a period to their day of grace, and that it may snatch them away suddenly, and unawares: yet they live as securely, as if they could call days and years their own: “Soul, take thine ease,” is the constant language of their hearts. Now, whence is all this? Will any one say, that these men are thoroughly persuaded even of the things which they profess most to believe? they certainly are not: they give a general assent to them, because they have been educated in these particular sentiments, and because their reason cannot but acquiesce in them as true: but as for the faith which realizes invisible things, which is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,” they have no portion of it; they are shut up altogether in unbelief.]

The prevalence of unbelief being thus unquestionably proved, we proceed to point out

I. The folly of it

A just view of this subject will soon convince us, that the very men, who glory in their unbelief, and say, “Wisdom shall die with us,”^e are indeed influenced by the most foolish and fatal of all principles: for, with respect to unbelief,

1. It cannot avert the evils, which it affects to despise

[Unbelief can never make void the truth of God. It did not in the days of old. When Satan said to our first parents, “Ye shall not surely die,” and they credited his testimony in preference to God’s, did their unbelief avail them? was the threatening less certain? Did God forbear to inflict it? Did not

^e Job xii. 2.

not their souls die that very day, being instantly separated from God, which constitutes spiritual death, and becoming obnoxious to his wrath, the chief ingredient of eternal death? Did not their bodies also, though for the peopling of the earth, and for other gracious purposes, they were suffered to continue awhile, become impregnated with the seeds of death, whereby they were in due time reduced again to their native dust?

When the unbelieving Jews rejected their Messiah, were the purposes of God at all frustrated? Yea, were they not rather furthered and accomplished by their unbelief? and were not the whole nation, except a little remnant, broken off from their stock, and the Gentiles, whom they regarded as accursed, engrafted on it?

So we may now ask of unbelieving sinners, “What if ye do not believe? shall your unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” Will God cease to be an holy, sin-hating, sin-avenging God, because ye presume to think him even such an one as yourselves? Shall sin no longer be debasing, defiling, damning, because ye choose to esteem it light and venial? Shall death wait your pleasure, because ye think ye have made a covenant with it, and put it far from you? shall the judgment-day lose its solemnity, and the account you are to give be made less strict, because you take it for granted, that all shall then be well with you? Shall hell be divested of its horrors, because you will not believe that there is any such place, or because you are averse to hear of it? Shall the nature and blessedness of heaven be altogether changed, in order that it may, according to your conceits, be the residence of the wicked as well as of the righteous? In short, is it reasonable, is it probable, is it possible, that the truth of God should be made void, merely because you do not choose to believe it?]

2. It enhances and insures the evils, whose very existence it presumes to deny

[The apostle tells us what should be the fixed principle of our minds, “Let God be true; but every man a liar.” But unbelief reverses this; and gives, not only to the testimony of man, but even to his most groundless conjectures, a greater weight than to the most solemn declarations of Jehovah. What an affront is this to the Majesty of heaven! Is there a man on earth that would not take offence at such an indignity, especially if it were offered to him by those whom he had never deceived, and for whose sake alone he had spoken? Let it not then be thought, that, to treat God as though he had no veracity, is a light matter; for surely it must greatly provoke the eyes of his glory.

Besides, unbelief, while it thus incenses God against us, re-

jects the only possible means of reconciliation with him; and consequently rivets all our guilt upon us———Judge then whether they, who yield themselves up to its influence, be not “blinded by Satan,” and victims to their own delusions?^f]

By way of IMPROVEMENT, let me commend to your attention the grand object of a Christian’s faith

[It is to little purpose to have *general* notions of the prevalence and folly of unbelief, if we do not apply them *particularly* to that fundamental doctrine of scripture, That we are to be justified solely by faith in the Lord Jesus. This is that, which is emphatically called, The gospel; concerning the *necessity* of believing which, nothing more need be urged, than that assertion of our Lord, “*He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.*”^g The point for us now to determine, is, Do we indeed believe in Christ for the justification of our souls? We are continually apt to mistake the nature of saving faith; and, for want of right views of that, we put away from ourselves all that is spoken respecting unbelief, as though we had no experience of it, no concern about it. But it has been already abundantly shewn, that if we believe only in the manner that the generality of Christians do, we have no *true* faith at all. Examine then, Have you clear and lively views of Christ as the Saviour of sinners? Are you deeply convinced of your own sinfulness, and your consequent need of mercy? Have you renounced every other hope? and do you rely simply and solely on Christ’s atonement? Finally, are you deriving virtue from him for the healing of your corruptions, and for the bringing forth of all the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory? *This*, and *this alone*, is saving faith; and he, who *thus* believes, shall be saved; and he, who does not *thus* believe, shall be damned. Let not any object, and say, “What is there in this faith that should save us, or in the want of it that should condemn us?” Our only enquiry must be, Has God suspended our salvation on the exercise of a living faith, or not? If he has, we have no more to say, than, “Let God be true; but every man a liar.” To dispute against him is to dispute against the wind. The wind will not stop its course for us: yet sooner should that be done, yea, “sooner should heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of his word should fail.” If then no objections of ours can ever disprove the truth of God’s word, or prevent the execution of it on our own souls, let us guard against that principle of unbelief, which operates so powerfully, so fatally, within us. Let us remember where our danger lies: it is not in giving too much weight to the declarations of God; but in softening them down, and accommo-

^f 2 Cor. iv. 4. Isaiah lxvi. 4.

^g Mark xvi. 16.

dating them to our vain wishes or carnal apprehensions. Let then the fore-mentioned record abide upon our minds. Let us be persuaded that he, whom God blesses, shall be blessed; and he, whom God curses, shall be cursed. In other words, Let us rest assured, that life is to be found in Christ alone; and that “he, who hath the Son, hath life; and he, who hath not the Son of God, hath not life.”^b]

^b 1 John v. 11, 12.

CCCLXVIII. THE NECESSITY OF FAITH IN CHRIST.

John iii. 36. *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

A FAITHFUL minister will find many occasions of rectifying the views and dispositions of his hearers; nor will he fail to improve the opportunities that occur of leading them to a more intimate acquaintance with their Lord—Some of the followers of John the Baptist having heard of the popularity of Jesus, were envious of his success, and jealous for the honour of their own teacher—But this holy man answered their complaints with much wisdom and humility; and having, in the strongest terms, given his testimony to the divine mission of Jesus, he confirmed his word with the solemn declaration which we have just read—This record contains the sum and substance of the gospel—It sets before us

I. The one condition of our salvation

We do not mean to say that there is any thing to be done, whereby we are to *earn* or *merit* heaven (in this respect our salvation has no conditions except those which were performed by Christ) but that

We must believe in Christ in order to obtain salvation

[The duty here enjoined is not so easy as men generally suppose—if it merely imported a consent to the truth of Christianity, it might then be performed without any difficulty or self-denial—but to “believe on the Son of God” is, to believe, that he is the only, and the all-sufficient Saviour or

our ruined race—If we do not feel our need of him; if we be not convinced that we can never obtain salvation by any works of our own; if we do not make earnest application to him at a throne of grace; and if we do not trust altogether in his blood and righteousness, we cannot believe aright—This, and nothing less than this, is the condition of our acceptance with God—]

Nor is there any other condition so suitable as this

[We may be ready to think that the performance of good works were a much fitter condition than faith—But if salvation were by works, no flesh living could be saved; because no man ever has kept, or ever can keep, the whole law of God—Nor should we be at all more safe, if *sincere* obedience were the term of our acceptance; because as no man has perfectly fulfilled the law, so no man has done all that he might have done; in many instances we might have mortified our sinful dispositions more, and approved ourselves more diligent in the discharge of our duty—Besides, if we were saved by any works of our own, we should have whereof to glory, and might ascribe, even in heaven itself, the honour to ourselves—Whereas the appointment of salvation by faith secures happiness to the most unworthy, if really penitent; and necessitates all to give the glory of their salvation to God alone—]

The Baptist having thus made known the condition of our acceptance with God, proceeds to declare

II. The state of those who comply with it

About this, which might have been thought a dubious point, no doubt whatever is expressed—The believer has

1. A title to eternal life

[There is not any title whatever to an earthly inheritance so secure as that which the believer has to heaven—He has the promise of Jehovah—He has a covenant sealed with Emmanuel's blood, and confirmed with the oath of God himself—and, provided he can appeal to God respecting his unfeigned reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ, he may put in his claim even at the bar of judgment, and demand, if we may so speak, all the glory of heaven as his unalienable inheritance—God hath said, “He that believeth shall be saved;” and if we only prove our performance of the condition, we need never doubt the fulfilment of God's promise—]

The beginning and earnest of eternal life

[The life which a believer has in his soul is of the same kind with that which he shall possess for ever—He has the same reconciliation with God, the same delight in him, and

the same sense of his favour—The Spirit of God that is within him is often called “an Earnest” of his inheritance; because that Spirit, in his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting influences, is a foretaste of heaven, and a pledge, that the soul possessed of it shall in due time enjoy all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world—He has only to wait the appointed hour, and his abode shall be in the presence of his God, where nothing that can trouble or defile him shall ever enter—Could an angel from heaven announce more joyful tidings?]

But it is not thus with all—Widely different is III. The state of those who do not comply with it

Here we may observe the same strength of assertion as in the former case—The text positively affirms that They shall not enter into heaven

[Unbelievers often seem as confident of obtaining eternal happiness as if all the promises of God had been made to them in particular—But they will be awfully disappointed as soon as ever they enter into the invisible world—“They will knock at the gate of heaven, crying, Lord, Lord, open to us: but he will answer them, Depart from me, I never knew you”—A flaming sword will prohibit their entrance into Paradise, and an impassable gulf be fixed between them and the celestial spirits—This is the declaration of God, nor can it ever be reversed—]

They shall be made eternal monuments of God’s wrath

[They will not be persuaded that God is angry with them; and because they feel not his judgments now, they think they never shall—But God even now is filled with wrath against them; and they are preserved only as condemned criminals in a dungeon, till the hour appointed for their execution shall arrive—God’s eye is ever upon them, not for good, but for evil—He views them as guilty of the most flagrant disobedience^a—He regards them as contemners both of his majesty, and of his mercy—He is incensed against them for “trampling under foot his dear Son, and doing despite to his Spirit”—And soon the wrath, which even now “abideth on them,” “shall come upon them to the uttermost”—]

APPLICATION

[Let all enquire seriously whether they do indeed believe— — — Let those, who have not hitherto come to Christ as lost and perishing sinners, guard against those workings of self-

^a Ο δε ἀπειθῶν is contrasted in the text with ο πειθῶν.

righteousness which would keep them from him———And let “ those who have believed be careful to maintain good works”———]

CCCLXIX. THE END OF UNBELIEVERS.

1 Pet. iv. 17. *What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

MANY are the troubles of the righteous: and though their afflictions are not always penal, yet they are for the most part to be considered as paternal chastisements, and as the judgments which God inflicts on his own household with a view to their advancement in faith and holiness—But though they are to be regarded in this favourable light by the sufferers themselves, they have a very awful aspect upon the world at large; for, as the Apostle intimates, if God’s paternal chastisements be often so severe, what must his vindictive judgments be? If judgment first begin at the house of God, what must the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?—To impress this solemn consideration upon our minds, we shall shew

I. Who they are that obey not the gospel

To ascertain this, it will be proper to state briefly what the gospel requires

[The gospel supposes men to be in a state of guilt and misery, obnoxious to the wrath of God, and incapable of delivering themselves from it—It proposes to them a remedy of God’s appointment: it sets forth Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour; and declares that sinners of every description may be washed in his blood, and renewed by his Spirit—But, if we will not apply to him by faith, and thankfully accept his proffered benefits, it dooms us to destruction under the aggravated guilt of despising, and trampling under foot the Son of God—The commission which our Lord gave to his disciples,^a and the answer given by Paul to the awakened jailor,^b abundantly confirm this view of the gospel, and shew that a cordial acceptance of Christ as our only Lord and Saviour is the sum and substance of a Christian’s duty—]

^a Mar. xvi. 15, 16.

^b Acts xvi. 30, 31.

According to this statement, very many will be found disobedient to the gospel

1. They who neglect Christ altogether

[This is so obvious a truth that the mention of it seems needless and absurd: but experience proves that the most abandoned sinners, and most avowed infidels, are often insensible of the guilt which they contract—Be it known however, that their excuses or objections will avail them nothing in the day of judgment: their whole lives were one continued act of disobedience to the gospel; and they will most assuredly be numbered amongst the enemies of their incarnate God—Their rejection of him, whether in principle or practice, will be a decisive evidence of their guilt—]

2: They who unite something else with him as a foundation for their hope

[The gospel requires us to renounce all dependence on our own works—However good our works be, they must never for one moment be considered as justifying us before God, either in whole or in part—In Christ alone must be all our hope; and if we attempt to unite any thing of ours with his perfect righteousness, we shall not only not add to our security, but shall altogether invalidate all which Christ himself has done for us—St. Paul asserts this in the plainest terms;^c and from the fullest conviction of its truth desired to be found in Christ, clad with his righteousness and his only^d]—

3. They who, while they profess to follow Christ, dishonour him by their conduct

[Many there are who with apparent zeal cry, Lord, Lord, who yet are far from doing the things which he commands—Many alas! “profess to know him, but in their works deny him:” they are observant of outward duties, but inattentive to their spirit and temper: instead of being meek and lowly, patient and forgiving, and solicitous only to honour God, they are proud and passionate, covetous and worldly, and studious rather to be thought Christians than really to deserve the name—Let such know that they “amidst all their appearances of religion deceive themselves, and their religion is vain”^e—By neglecting to walk as Christ walked they disobey the gospel, as much as if they rejected him altogether—]

To awaken such from their slumbers, we proceed to shew

^c Gal. v. 2, 4.

^d Phil. iii. 9.

^e Jam. i. 26.

II. What their end shall be

The peculiar manner, in which the Apostle speaks of their “end,” intimates that it will be dreadful

1. Beyond expression

[In the text St. Peter infers from the trials, which God suffers to come upon believers *here*, the far greater miseries that shall be endured by unbelievers *hereafter*.—But his very mode of suggesting this inference shews, that the two states could scarcely admit of any comparison: for what are any transient pains of body inflicted by the most ingenious cruelty of man, when compared with the eternal torments both of soul and body, which will be inflicted on the wicked by the hand of an incensed God?—St. Paul institutes a similar comparison, and, like St. Peter, leaves our imagination to supply what no language could possibly express.—There are indeed terms used in scripture to represent to us the misery of the damned.—They are represented as “cast into a lake of fire and brimstone,” “where the worm of an accusing conscience dieth not, and the fire of God’s wrath is not quenched;” they “weep and wail and gnash their teeth;” and the “smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.” But, awful as these expressions are, they convey no adequate idea of the misery sustained by those who have perished in unbelief: we must say of that, as St. Paul says of the things he heard and saw in the third heavens, that it is unutterable.—]

2. Beyond a doubt

[The Apostle appeals to our own consciences for the truth of the inference which he suggests.—He says, in effect, What must the state of unbelievers be? Can it be the same with that of obedient believers? Will God put no difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not? Has not the scripture plainly declared the end of those who disobey the gospel? And are we not constrained to acknowledge the equity of that sentence, which the contemners of Christ are taught to expect?—Shall not an angel from heaven be accursed, if he presume to preach any other gospel,^b and can we hope to reject the gospel with impunity? Our wishes are doubtless in opposition to the declarations of God; but in our judgment we must approve of them; and we shall surely be silent in the day that they shall be enforced, even though we ourselves be the unhappy monuments of God’s displeasure.—]

We may LEARN from hence

^a Heb. x. 29.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 4.

^b Gal. i. 8.

1. How to improve the dispensations of God's providence

[In God's providential dealings the most eminent Christians are often involved in public calamities, or bowed down under a load of personal afflictions—On the other hand the enemies of God often triumph, and revel in a fulness of all earthly enjoyments—But the intelligent Christian will see in these dispensations the certainty of a future day of retribution, when the wicked shall receive the just reward of their wickedness, and he himself be exalted to an inconceivable state of bliss—He will argue thus: If God so afflict his children in the day of his mercy, how will he punish his enemies in the day of his wrath? And if he so prosper his enemies and load them with benefits in this vale of tears, what prosperity and happiness must he have reserved for his friends in the regions of glory? If crowns and kingdoms be the portion of many who disregard and despise him, what shall be the inheritance of those who honour and obey him?—Such are the reflections suggested in the text; and such are the considerations which every dispensation, whether joyous or grievous, should excite in our minds—]

2. How to judge of our state before God

[Mere morality is by no means a sufficient criterion whereby to judge of our state: we may be free from gross violations of God's law, and yet be far from yielding obedience to the gospel—Let us then enquire whether we be obeying the gospel by a simple dependence upon Christ, and by a spirit and temper suited to our profession? This is the test to which we must bring ourselves, since we shall be tried by it at the last day—In vain will be our morality, if Christ be not our only foundation; and in vain will be our professed adherence to Christ, if we do not adorn the gospel by an holy conversation—Let us then examine ourselves, that we may know beforehand what our end shall be—And let all earthly comforts or troubles be improved as means of exciting us to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life—]

CCCLXX. THE SIN OF MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 5. *But they made light of it.*

WE are apt to condemn the Jews as blind and obstinate, because they rejected Christ in spite of the clearest evidence in his favour—But we ourselves are more

guilty than they, because we enjoy much greater advantages for understanding the gospel than they did, and yet are as regardless of it as they were.

Our blessed Lord illustrated their conduct by a marriage-feast, to which they who were invited, refused to come. The same invitation is sent to us; and we, no less than they, "make light of it."

To bring home a conviction of this upon our minds, we shall shew.

I. What are the blessings which we are invited to partake of

God is here represented as having made a marriage for his Son

[The figure of a marriage union is often used to represent the connexion that subsists between Christ and his church^a—He is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride^b—And the connexion is then formed, when the church gives up herself to Christ as her head and Lord, and by faith becomes so united to him as to be one flesh,^c or to speak more properly, "one spirit with him"^d]—]

The feast prepared on the occasion contains all the blessings of grace and glory

[There is nothing that can nourish or delight the soul, which God has not prepared for the bride on her union with Christ^e—She instantly becomes related to him, and is considered in all things as his daughter, an object of his affections, and a partaker of his inheritance—Let any one enquire, What is there that my soul can desire in time or eternity? and he shall find it all set before him, that he may freely and richly enjoy it—]

To a participation of this feast we are sent to invite you

[In one view, they to whom we are sent, are the bride; but in another view, they are the guests—The commission God has given to his servants is, to "go out into the highways and hedges, and to bring in as many as they can find"—To you therefore we come, declaring that no unworthiness on your parts shall exclude you, provided you put on the wedding garment, which the Master of the feast has prepared for you—Accept the invitation; and all the blessings of salvation shall be yours—Pardon, peace, strength, and whatever else

^a Jer. iii. 14. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^b Isaiah liv. 5. Rev. xxi. 9.

^c Eph. v. 30—32.

John iii. 29.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 7.

Isaiah xxv. 6.

can comfort the weary, and support the weak, shall become the daily, the everlasting food of your souls—]

To evince how much our message is disregarded, we proceed to shew

II. Who are they that make light of the invitation

Among the numberless classes that might be mentioned, two only shall be selected;

1. They who satisfy themselves with excuses for declining it

[The persons, mentioned in the context, excused themselves on account of “their farms or merchandize”—But their pleas, however satisfactory in their own eyes, were not admitted by God—On the contrary, he declared them to be “unworthy ever to taste of his supper”—Now what excuses has any man more urgent than these?—And if these were of no avail in their case, what right have we to think, that the plea of worldly business will be admitted in our favour?—If the prosecuting of our worldly business were really incompatible with the enjoyment of God, there can be no doubt which we ought to prefer—He was “a wise merchant, who having found a pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it”—But our duties to God and to the world are by no means irreconcileable with each other—And therefore the resting in such vain excuses shews, that we make light of the salvation offered us—]

2. They who do not accept it with all thankfulness

[Blessings, like those set before us in the gospel, ought to be regarded as of the first importance—I indifference towards them is a positive contempt of them—if a slave, whom we had ransomed at a great price, and to whom we offered liberty, and affluence, and honour, should express no gratitude, no joy on the occasion, should we not think that he “made light of” our proffered kindness?—But what bondage is so dreadful as that in which we are held by sin and Satan? or what liberty is like that of God’s children? or what comparison is there between the riches and honours of this world, and those which are imparted to us on our union with Christ?—If then our joy and gratitude excited by the gospel salvation, be not in some measure proportioned to its value and importance, we cannot but be considered as making light of it—]

Nor will this be thought a venial matter, if we duly consider

III. The folly and sinfulness of their conduct

But what words can sufficiently express this? for they make light of

1. That which is of the greatest possible value

[Estimate the blessings of salvation either *positively* by the price paid for them, or *comparatively* by weighing them, as it were, in a balance against all other things, and then see what it is that they despise—Only consider, that every one of those blessings was bought with blood, with the blood of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, a price infinitely exceeding ten thousand worlds—Is there no guilt, no folly in disregarding things of such inestimable value?—Bring into competition with them all that the world can give; and it will be found lighter than the dust upon the balance, yea, “altogether lighter than vanity itself”—Well therefore does the apostle put that unanswerable question, “How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?”^f]—]

2. That without which they can never be happy

[The creature, at best, is but as “a broken cistern:” in vain shall any one go to it for solid happiness^g—“There is not, there cannot be, any true peace to the wicked”^h—Let any man try to make himself happy, while the guilt of all his sins continues to lie upon him, and he is in awful suspense about his eternal state; he may be thoughtless as a child, or stupid as a beast; but he cannot be happy—And if this be the case in the midst of all his gaiety, what will be his situation in a dying hour?—At all events, supposing him ever so happy in life and in death, how will he feel himself on his first entrance into the invisible world?—Will he who made light of the marriage-feast on earth, sit down with boldness at “the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven?”—Will all those employments to which he was averse in this world, be at once his joy and delight, as soon as he passes into the world above?—If he disregarded earthly things, he would have reason on his side; because he might be happy in God, even though he were destitute of every thing else: but to hope for happiness without God is a desperate delusion; and consequently, to make light of the invitations of the gospel is nothing less than madness itself—]

3. That which they are sure to value, when it will be gone beyond recovery

[Here men are of very different sentiments; some accounting godliness the one thing needful, and others despising it as enthusiasm and needless singularity—But in the eternal world there is no such diversity of opinion: the saints in glory are fully confirmed in the judgment they had formed

^f Heb. ii. 3.

^g Jer. ii. 13.

^h Isaiah xlvi. 22.

on earth; and the wicked in hell are fully convinced of their error; the one know by their enjoyments how good it was to obey the heavenly call; and the other know by their sufferings, what “a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God”—What then is it but madness to make light of that, which we are so sure to value when there remains to us no longer any possibility of attaining it?—

Let due weight be given to these considerations, and we shall need nothing more to convince us either of the folly or sinfulness of slighting the invitations of the gospel—]

APPLICATION

[It is to be feared that, after all, many will persist in their infatuated conduct—But we would at least make one more effort to reclaim them; and beg of God to render his word effectual to their conversion—

Know then that the marriage supper is now prepared; and we, as God's servants, come in his name to invite you to it—We invite you *all*: the rich, the poor; the old, the young; the moral, the immoral—We announce to you, that all things are ready.—Are *ye* then not ready?—If ye say, “We have not a suitable garment; we declare to you, that the Master of the feast has provided garments for all his guests; and that ye need only to be clothed with the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and ye shall instantly be acceptable in the sight of God—Put away then your excuses: receive thankfully the invitation sent you: and begin to feast upon those spiritual provisions that shall nourish your souls unto life eternal—]

i Wisd. v. 4.

CCCLXXI. THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE LAW:

Rom. vii. 7. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

THERE is not any thing, however good, which has not been abused to the vilest purposes—

The blessings of Providence are rendered subservient to intemperance

The holy scriptures are often wrested to support error—

But we must blame, not the things that are perverted, but the persons who pervert them—

We must estimate things by their use, and not by their abuse—

To this effect the apostle speaks respecting the law of God^a—

And, in his vindication of it, he opens to us

I. Its nature

The law here spoken of must be the *moral law*, because it is that which forbids inordinate desire—

Its spirituality may be seen by considering

1. The commandments in general

[Our Lord comprises them all in two, namely, love to God, and love to man^b—

Our love to God must be supreme, without intermission or reserve—

The smallest defect in the degree or manner of our love is a violation of our duty towards him—

Our love to our neighbour must resemble our love to ourselves—

This is transgressed, not by overt acts only, but by secret thoughts—

In this extent our Lord himself explains those very commandments, which we should be most ready to limit and restrain—

Hence it appears, that we may be blameless respecting the outward breach of the law, and yet have transgressed every one of the commandments throughout our whole lives—]

2. The particular commandment before us

[This, in the very letter of it, extends to our inclinations and desires—

It prohibits all dissatisfaction with our own state or lot—
all envy at the prosperity of others—
all desire of any evil or forbidden object—
all inordinate love even of good and lawful objects—

It does not say, that we must not *indulge* a wrong desire, but that we must not *have* it—

^a He had spoken of the law as the *accidental occasion* of sin and death, ver. 5. From hence he supposes that some would object against it as the *cause* of sin and death. But, shuddering at such a blasphemous thought, he refutes the objection; and shews that, instead of being a promoter of sin, it discovered and prohibited sin in its first and most secret workings.

^b Matt. xvii. 37-40

^c Matt. v. 21, 22, 24, 25, 28

Well therefore does David say respecting the law, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad"^d]—

It may seem unjust in God to publish such a law, seeing that man in his present fallen state cannot keep it one single hour—

But God could not, consistently with his own honour and our good, publish a less spiritual law than this—

And this will be found both "just and good,"^e if we consider

II. Its use

Many are the uses of this law both to saints and sinners—

But there is one use in particular mentioned in the text; and to that we shall confine our attention—

The nature of sin is but little understood

[The generality think sin consists only in the outward act—]

Hence they suppose themselves in a good and safe state—

This was the case with St. Paul himself before his conversion—]

But the law is intended to discover sin to us in its true colours

[Like a perfect rule, it leads to a discovery of our smallest obliquities—

When applied to our motives, and principles, and to the manner and measure of our duties, it shews us that our very best actions are extremely defective—

Thus it plucks up by the roots all conceit of our own goodness—

And causes us to lie low before God as miserable sinners—

It was to a view of the law that St. Paul owed his knowledge of his own sinfulness^f—

And it is by this light that we must see the evil of our state—]

APPLICATION

1. What "know" we of "sin?"

[Have we ever seen the spirituality and extent of the law?—

laid the law as a line to our consciences?—

discovered by it the obliquity of our best actions?—

^d Ps. cxix. 96.

^e Ver. 12.

^f The text.

Have we ever been bowed down under the weight of our transgressions?

— felt the impossibility of being justified by the law? —

No attainments in knowledge or goodness will profit us without this —

Paul himself, though he thought well of his own state, was really dead while he was ignorant of the law —

And when the spirituality of the law was revealed to him, then he saw and confessed himself an undone sinner —

Let us then seek increasing views of the law, that we may be made truly humble and contrite —]

2. What know we of the deliverer from sin?

[There is One who has fulfilled the demands of the law —

His obedience and righteousness will avail for us —

Have we fled to him as the fulfller of the law for us? —

— taken refuge in him who bore its curse for us? —

Do we see the need of him to “ bear the iniquity of our holy things”? —

Let us then bless God for such a Saviour —

And “ cleave to him with full purpose of heart” —]

3. What regard are we yet daily shewing to the law?

[We are indeed delivered from its penal sanctions —

Nor ought we to regard it any longer *as a covenant* —

But we are still subject to its commands —

And ought to receive it *as a rule of life* —

If we are sincere, we shall not account even the strictest of its commandments grievous^b —

Let us then remember that it still “ says to us, Thou shalt not covet” —

Let us, in obedience to it, mortify all discontent and envy, all improper and inordinate desire —

And let it be the labour of our lives to glorify God by our professed subjection to it —]

CCCLXXII. OUR VIOLATIONS OF EVERY COMMANDMENT.

Rom. iii. 20. *By the law is the knowledge of sin.*

OUR lost estate, and our consequent need of a Saviour can never be truly known, unless we compare our lives with that universal rule of duty, the law of God.

St. Paul took this method of proving that both Jews and Gentiles were under sin: in all the preceding part of this Epistle he sets forth their transgressions against the law; and having confirmed his assertions by many passages out of the Old Testament, he says in the verse before my text, "We know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." From hence it is evident that the law of which he is speaking, is the moral law, that same law which was originally engraven in the heart of Adam, and was afterwards published to the world on Mount Sinai: for the Gentiles having never been subject to the ceremonial or judicial law, it can be no other than the moral law, which shuts *their* mouth and brings *them* in guilty before God. The principal ends for which he referred them to this law were these; first to convince them that they could not be justified by their obedience to it (and therefore in the words immediately preceding our text, he says, that by the law shall no flesh be justified;) and secondly, to shew them their undone condition by the law; and therefore he adds, in the words of our text, "by the law is the knowledge of sin."

From these words we shall take occasion to compare our lives with the law of God, that so we may obtain the knowledge of our sins: and while we are thus bringing our iniquities to remembrance, may the Spirit of God come down upon us, to convince us all of sin, and to reveal unto us that only Deliverer from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ!

The law was delivered to Moses upon two tables of stone, and comprised in ten commandments.

The first of the commandments respects the *object* of our worship, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me." In this we are required to believe in God, to love him, and to serve him with all our hearts, and minds, and souls, and strength: and if we examine ourselves by it, we shall see that our transgressions are neither few nor small: for instead of believing in him at all times, how rarely have we either trembled at his threatenings or confided in his promises! Instead of loving him supremely, have we not set our affections on the things of time and

sense? Instead of fearing him above all, have we not been swayed rather by the fear of man, or a regard to our worldly interests? Instead of relying on him in all difficulties, have we not rather "leaned to our own understanding, and trusted in an arm of flesh?" and instead of making it our meat and drink to do *his* will, have we not lived to ourselves, seeking our own pleasure, and following our own ways? Surely if we seriously enquire into our past conduct, we shall find that throughout our whole lives "other lords have had dominion over us," the world has been our idol, and self has usurped the throne of God. If therefore we were to be tried by this commandment only, our offences would appear exceeding numerous, more than the hairs of our head, more than the sands upon the sea shore.

The second commandment respects the *nature* of worship; "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image." God is a Spirit, and therefore is not to be addressed by the medium of any sensible object, but is to be "worshipped in spirit and in truth." Yet, whenever we have presented ourselves before him, we have scarcely paid him more respect, yea frequently much less, than the heathens manifest towards their gods of wood and stone. Let us only consider what has been the frame of our minds when we have approached the throne of grace; how little have we stood in awe of his Majesty! How unaffected has been our sense either of our wants, or of his power and readiness to help us! And if we look at the prayers which we have offered, we shall see cause to acknowledge, that they have been dull, formal, and hypocritical. Our confessions have neither been attended with humility nor followed by amendment: our petitions have been without faith and without fervour: and our thanksgivings, which should have been the warm effusions of a grateful heart, have frozen on our very lips. Indeed secret prayer is by the generality either wholly omitted, or performed as a task or drudgery: as for family devotions they are wholly, and almost universally, neglected: and in the public assemblies, instead of breathing out our hearts before God, our thoughts are wandering to the ends of the earth, or as the scripture has said, "we draw nigh unto God with our mouth, but our heart

is far from him." Let us all therefore consult the records of our own consciences, that we may judge ourselves with respect to these things; nor let us forget that every such omission, and every such defect has swelled the number of our transgressions, and greatly aggravated our guilt and misery.

The third commandment respects the *manner* of worship; "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The name of God is never to be uttered by us but with awe and reverence. But, not to mention the stupid indifference with which it is often repeated in prayer, how *generally*, how *daringly* is it profaned in common conversation, so *generally*, that no age, sex, or quality is exempt from this impious custom; and so *daringly*, that it is even vindicated: the thoughtless manner in which that sacred name is used, is often urged as an excuse for the profanation of it; when it is that very thoughtlessness which constitutes the profanation. But instead of extenuating the guilt of this sin, we shall do well to consider what God has said respecting it, "the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

The fourth commandment respects the *time* of worship; "Remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy." In what manner we are to keep it holy, the prophet Isaiah teaches us;² "Turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and honour HIM, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words." But how has this day been regarded by us? Have we conscientiously devoted it to God, and spent those sacred hours in reading, meditation and prayer? Have we, as well by example as by precept, inculcated on our dependants a regard for the sabbath? and have we improved it for the welfare of their souls as well as of our own? alas! have not those blessed seasons been rather wasted in worldly business, worldly company, and worldly pleasures? Yes, it is to be feared that however we may have kept up a mere formal attendance on the external services of the church, we have not any of us accounted our sabbaths a

² Isaiah lviii. 13.

delight, or spent them in devout and holy exercises. We may rest assured however, that of every such abuse of the sabbath we shall give a strict account; for if God has so solemnly warned us to “remember that we keep the sabbath holy,” no doubt he himself will remember what regard we pay to it.

Here end the commandments of the first table, which relate to God, as those of the second table relate more especially to our neighbour: yet not so entirely as to exclude ourselves. We proceed therefore with them.

The fifth commandment, “ Honour thy father and thy mother,” requires a becoming deportment not only towards our own immediate parents, but towards all mankind, however related to us; our superiors, equals, and inferiors: to the first of these we owe submission; to the two last, love and condescension. But how often have we affected independence, and refused submission to lawful authority! How often have we envied the advancement of our equals, or exalted ourselves above them! How often have we treated our inferiors with haughtiness and severity! Even our natural parents we have by no means honoured as we ought, nor sustained any relation in life as God has required us to do. In all these respects therefore we have sinned before God, and “ treasured up wrath for ourselves against the day of wrath.”

Thus far many will readily acknowledge themselves guilty. But so ignorant are mankind in general of the spirituality and extent of God’s law, that they account themselves blameless with respect to all the other commandments: if they have not literally, and in the grossest sense, committed murder, adultery, theft, or perjury, they have no conception how they can have transgressed the laws which forbid these things. But let us calmly and dispassionately examine this matter; bearing this in mind, that it is our interest to know our sins; because by knowing them, we shall be stirred up to seek the forgiveness of them through the Saviour’s blood; whereas, if we remain ignorant of our sins, we shall not feel our need of a Saviour, and shall consequently die without an interest in him.

The sixth commandment then respects our own and our neighbour’s *life*; “ Thou shalt do no murder.” We

take for granted that none of us have imbrued our hands in human blood: yet this by no means exempts us from the charge of murder: our Lord, in that justly admired sermon on the mount, has given us the clue, whereby we may be led to a true exposition of this and of all the other commandments; "Ye have heard," says he, "that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment, and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." By this comment of our Lord's we are assured that causeless anger and passion are esteemed by him as violations of this commandment. And St. John in the third chapter of his first Epistle confirms this, by saying, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death; whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." From this additional testimony therefore we see that the hating of any person, or the not truly loving him, is a species of murder in the sight of God. Who then is innocent? Who has been free from passion? Who has not often conceived anger and hatred against his neighbour? And shall it be thought unreasonable to call this murder? Look at the effects of anger; how often has it terminated in murder, when the perpetrators of the act little supposed themselves capable of such an atrocious crime! and if we have been irritated and provoked by small occasions, who can tell what our anger might have effected if the occasion had been increased, and the preventing grace of God withdrawn? And what is that which the world has falsely called a sense of honour? 'tis revenge, 'tis murder; murder in the heart, as it often proves murder in the act. But there are other ways of committing murder: if we have wished a rival dead in order that we might be advanced; if we have wished an enemy dead because of our aversion to him; if we have wished a relation or any other person dead, in order that we might succeed to his fortune or preferment, or if we have rejoiced in the death of another on any of these accounts, we have manifested

that same principle in our hearts, which, if kindled by temptation and favoured by opportunity, would have produced the most fatal effects. Nor is this all: we are no less guilty in the sight of God if we do what tends to the destruction of our own life, than if we seek the destruction of our neighbour's life. Not to mention therefore the too common act of suicide, how many bring upon themselves pain, sickness, and disease, I may add too, an early and premature death, by means of debauchery and excess. Let not any one therefore imagine himself innocent even in respect of murder: for in every instance of anger, impatience, or intemperance, yea, whenever we have wished for, or rejoiced in, another's dissolution, we have violated this commandment.

The seventh commandment respects our own and our neighbour's *chastity*: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Fornication and adultery are by many practised without remorse, and recorded without shame. But to such we may well address the words of Solomon: "Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will call thee into judgment." Nor will it avail any thing to say, that we committed these sins only in our youth; and that now we have left them off; for sin is sin, wheresoever and by whomsoever committed; and however it may have escaped our memory, it is not therefore erased from the book of God's remembrance; nor, however partial the world may be in its judgment respecting it, will it escape due notice at another tribunal; for we are assured by the apostle, that "whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

But this commandment extends much further than to the outward act: it reaches to the inmost thoughts and desires of the heart: let us hear an infallible expositor; let us hear what our Lord himself says in his sermon on the mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." By this commandment therefore is forbidden all indulgence of unclean thoughts, and consequently

all immodest words, all obscene allusions, all wanton looks, all impure desires and affections. Who then will say, I am pure? Who will take up a stone to cast at another?

The eighth commandment respects our neighbour's *goods*; "Thou shalt not steal." Theft is universally branded with disgrace; and it may be hoped that we, who have been so far out of the reach of want, have never been reduced to so infamous a practice. Yet how many are guilty of practices equally repugnant to the spirit to this commandment! How many defraud the government by withholding or evading the legal imposts! How many defraud the public by circulating coin which they know to be either base or defective! How many defraud those with whom they transact business, by taking undue advantage of their ease, their ignorance, or their necessities! How many defraud their creditors by neglecting to pay their debts! And how many defraud the poor by not giving to them what the great proprietor of all hath made their due! If indeed we regard only these *effects* of dishonesty, they will probably appear to us light and insignificant; but if we look to the *principle* which gives birth to these things, it will be found no less corrupt than that which manifests itself in theft and robbery. Odious therefore as the imputation of fraud may justly be considered, there is not one who has not at some time or other been guilty of it: so that this commandment as well as all that have preceded it, will accuse us before God.

The ninth commandment respects our neighbour's *reputation*; "Thou shalt not bear false witness." We offend against this law, not only when we perjure ourselves before a magistrate, but whenever we misrepresent the conduct of others, or pass hasty and ungrounded censures upon them. All whisperers therefore, and back-biters, and all who circulate reports injurious to their neighbour, are condemned by it: nor does it forbid such falsehoods only as are pernicious, but, such also as are jocular, marvellous, or exculpatory: for, as to the morality of the act, it matters little whether we falsify to our neighbour, or *against* him. Who then has not been often guilty in these respects? Who does not feel the

force of the Psalmist's observation, that "as soon as we are born we go astray, speaking lies?" Nor let any think lightly of this sin: for so detestable is it in the sight of God, that he has given us this solemn warning, "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The tenth commandment "Thou shalt not covet," is perhaps the most extensive of any; because while the others forbid the indulgence of any sinful *act*, this forbids the first risings of *desire* after any sinful object: it utterly condemns the least motions of discontent at our own lot, or of envy at the lot of others. It was this commandment which first wounded the conscience of the apostle Paul; he was in all points relating to the ceremonial law, blameless, and he conceived that he must therefore of necessity be in a state of salvation: but this good opinion of his state arose from his ignorance of the spirituality and extent of the law: and when his eyes were once opened to see that the law condemned him for the first risings of evil as well as for the actual commission of it, he became guilty in his own sight, and acknowledged the justice of his condemnation: thus he says of himself; "I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust (i. e. the evil and danger of it) unless the law had said, thou shalt not covet: for I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died." The plain meaning of which is this; before he understood the spirituality of the law he thought himself safe; but when that was revealed to him, he saw himself justly condemned for his offences against it. May that same, that salutary, conviction be wrought also in our hearts! for our Lord has told us, that "the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" plainly intimating thereby, that we must feel our need of him, before we shall be willing to receive his saving benefits. Though therefore we may think as highly of our state as the Apostle did of his, yet if we feel not our condemnation by the law, we shall but deceive ourselves; and though we be possessed of his knowledge, zeal and holiness, yet shall we, like him, be "dead in trespasses and sins:" for till we be indeed weary and heavy-laden with a sense

of sin, we never shall, nor ever can, come unto Christ for rest.

To conclude—If, while we have been surveying the duties of the first table, we have called to mind our low esteem for God, together with the unnumbered instances wherein we have neglected his worship, misemployed his sabbaths, and profaned his name; if in examining the duties of the second table, we have remembered our several violations of them, both *generally*, by misconduct in the different relations of life, and *particularly*, by anger and intemperance, by actual or mental impurity, by dishonesty or want of liberality, by wilful and allowed falsehood, by discontent with our own lot, or coveting of another's, surely we shall confess with the Psalmist, that “our iniquities are grown up unto heaven, they are a sore burthen too heavy for us to bear.” We shall see also with how great propriety the compilers of our Liturgy have directed us to cry after every commandment, “Lord, have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to keep this law.”

To make us thus cry out for mercy is the proper use of the law; for the apostle says, “the law is our school-master to bring us unto Christ.” And if we once obtain this view of the law, and by it the knowledge of our sins, we shall then have the best preservative against errors: for instead of making the divinity of Christ and his atonement a matter of mere speculative enquiry, we shall see that we have no safety but in his blood, no acceptance but in his righteousness. We shall then “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,” and shall each of us be like-minded with that great apostle who said, “I desire to be found *in Christ*, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

CCCLXXIII. THE EXTENT OF MAN'S DEPRAVITY.

Rom. iii. 10—20. *It is written, There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.*

THE scriptures are the only, and infallible source of divine knowledge—

To them the apostles continually refer in support of their doctrines—

No subject is capable of more ample proof from them than that before us—

St. Paul is shewing that all mankind are guilty and depraved—

In confirmation of this he cites many passages from the Old Testament^a—

From these, as stated and improved in the text, we are led to consider

I. The representation which the scripture gives of our state

The testimonies here adduced, declare, that the most lamentable depravity pervades

1. All ranks and orders of men

“There is none righteous, no not one,”^b—

[Righteousness is a conformity of heart and life to the law of God—

^a See Ps. xiv. 1—3. Prov. i. 16, 18. Isaiah lix. 7, 8.

^b The apostle has so arranged his quotations as to form a beautiful climax, every subsequent passage affirming more than that which precedes it.

Where is the man on earth that possesses it by nature?—

Where is the man whose deviations from this standard have not been innumerable?—]

“ There is none that understandeth”

[The natural man has no discernment of spiritual things^e—
His practical judgment is in favour of sin and the world—]

“ There is none that seeketh after God”

[The things of time and sense are diligently pursued—
But whoever cultivates divine knowledge, or seriously enquires after God?^d]—

“ All are gone out of the way”

[Men universally prefer the way of self-righteousness to that of faith in Christ—

And that of sin and self-indulgence to holiness and self-denial—

No one that sees them would imagine, that they really intended to tread in the steps of Christ and his apostles—]

“ They are together become unprofitable”

[God has formed us for his own glory, and each others good—

But unregenerate men never attempt to answer these ends of their creation—

Hence they are justly compared to things worthless and vile—]

“ There is none that doeth good, no not one”

[Nothing is really good, which is not so in its principle, rule, and end^f—

But where is the action of any natural man that will stand this test?—]

2. All the faculties and powers of men

[Nothing is more offensive than an open sepulchre;^g or more venomous than an asp—

Yet both the one and the other fitly represent the effusions of a carnal heart—

“ Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak”—

^e 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Job xxxv. 10.

^f They may do good to the bodies of men; but never shew any real solicitude about their souls. Indeed, how should they, when they care not for their own souls?

^g Luke xiv 34, 35. and John xv. 6.

^h The fear and love of God are the *principle*, the scriptures the *rule*, and God's glory the *end* of Christian obedience, 1 Cor. x. 31.

ⁱ Matt. xxiii. 27.

Deceit, calumny, invective, yea, in many instances, the most horrible oaths and execrations will proceed from it—

Hence that awful description of the human tongue^k—

From *words* we are ready also to proceed to *actions*, yea, even the most cruel and atrocious—

Who that sees with what readiness nations engage in war, will question the declaration in the text?—

Hazaël revolted at the idea of murder, when warned of his propensity to commit it; yet notwithstanding his present feelings, how “*swift* were his feet to shed blood!”^l—

How many at this day are impelled by shame even to destroy their own offspring!—

How frequently do men engage in duels on account of the slightest injury or insult!—

And in how many instances might we ourselves, when irritated and inflamed, have committed murder in an unguarded moment, exactly as others have done, who in a cooler moment would have shuddered at the thought!—

The instance of David, who, though “a man after God’s own heart,” murdered Uriah, and many others with him, to conceal his shame, is sufficient of itself to shew us, what the best of men might commit, if left to themselves^m—

Well we may apply to this subject that humiliating language of the prophetⁿ—

“Thus, God himself being witness, instead of walking in “paths of peace” and safety, we all by nature prefer the “ways which bring destruction and misery” both on ourselves and all around us^o—

The whole of our state is properly summed up in *this*, that “there is no fear of God before our eyes; so entirely are our understandings blinded, and our hearts alienated from him, by means of our innate depravity^p]—

This humiliating view of our state should lead us to consider

II. The inferences to be deduced from it

Those which the apostle suggests in the text will suffice for our attention at this time—

^k No less than four expressions, and those exceeding strong, are used to declare the evils of the tongue.

^l James iii. 6. ¹ 2 Kings viii. 12, 13. with ib. ver. 15. and xiii. 7.

^m 2 Sam. xi. 14—17. ⁿ Isaiah i. 5, 6. ^o Ps. xxxvi. 1.

^p Ver. 16. and 17. relate primarily to the evil which men do to *others*, though they may include what they do to *themselves*. See Isaiah lix. 7, 8.

1. We are all "guilty before God"

[It seems inconceivable to many, that they should really be obnoxious to everlasting misery in hell—

And they will plead their own cause with zeal and eloquence—

If they concede it with respect to some more heinous transgressors, they will deny it in reference to themselves—

But God has taken care that "every mouth should be stopped"—

It is not possible to express the universality of men's wickedness more strongly than it is expressed in the words before us"—

All then must "become guilty before God," and acknowledge their desert of his wrath and indignation—

They must feel their desert of condemnation, as much as a man that has been condemned for parricide feels the justice of the sentence which is pronounced against him—

O that we might all be brought to such unfeigned contrition! we should "not then be far from the kingdom of God"]

2. We can never be justified by any works of our own

[“We know that what the law saith, it saith unto them that are under the law”—

Now the law saith, “Do this and live: transgress it, and thou shalt die”^s—

But it speaks not one word about mitigating its demand to the weak, or its penalties to the guilty—

How then can any man "be justified by the works of the law?"—

Can a man be guilty, and not guilty? or can he be condemned by the law and yet justified at the same time, and in the same respects?—

Let all hope then, and all thought of justification by the law be put away from us for ever—

God has provided a better way for our justification, namely, through the blood and righteousness of his dear Son'—

And to lead us into that way was the intention of the Apostle in citing the passages that have already been considered—

Let us improve this humiliating representation for this salutary end—

So shall we be "justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"^u—

^q "None, no not one;" "none; none; none, no not one;" "all; all together;" "every mouth;" even "all the world." Can any, after this, fancy himself an exception?

^r Ps. li. 17.

^t Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^s Rom. x. 5. Gal. iii. 10.

^u Ib. ver. 24.

CCCLXXIV. THE BELIEVER'S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Rom. iii. 21, 22. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe.

IT is justly observed by our Lord, that “they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” Persons never value a remedy till they are aware of their disease: they must know their condemnation and misery by the law, before they will receive with gratitude the glad tidings of the gospel. On this account St. Paul labours through the whole preceding part of this Epistle, and especially in the ten verses before the text, to prove all, both Jews and Gentiles, guilty before God; and to shew that they need a better righteousness than any which they themselves can work out. Then he introduces that righteousness which is exhibited in the gospel, and is offered to every repenting and believing sinner.

To elucidate the subject before us, we propose to shew
I. What is that righteousness whereby we are to be saved

The Apostle’s description of it is as clear and comprehensive as we can possibly desire

1. It is “the righteousness of God”

[*Twice* is it called “the righteousness of God;” by which expression we are to understand that it is a righteousness *provided by God for us, wrought out by God amongst us, and accepted of God on our behalf.*

When we were destitute of any righteousness of our own, and incapable of establishing one that should be sufficient for us, God, in his infinite mercy determined to provide one for us, that should be commensurate with the demands of law and justice, and fully adequate to our wants. For this end he sent his co-equal, co-eternal Son to fulfil the precepts of the law which we had broken, and to endure its penalties which we had incurred. The Lord Jesus came into the world and executed his high commission; and thus, as the prophet Daniel expresses it, “brought in an everlasting righteousness.”^a

He being "Emmanuel, God with us," his righteousness is the righteousness of God. *This* God accepts for us as though it were our own. In consideration of what Jesus suffered, he remits our punishment; and in consideration of Christ's meritorious obedience he bestows on us the reward of eternal life. Hence, from beginning to end, this is distinguished from the righteousness of *man*; seeing that it was provided by God the Father, wrought out by God the Son, and shall be accepted both by the Father and the Son on our behalf.]

2. It is a righteousness "without the law"

[By this expression the Apostle distinguishes it from any righteousness arising from our obedience to the law; and intimates, that it is totally independent of any works of ours, whether past, present, or future. No works of ours can add to it in the smallest degree, or render it either more satisfactory to God, or more sufficient for us. On the contrary, if we were to attempt to unite any thing of our own with it, instead of rendering it more firm, we should utterly make it void; and instead of securing to ourselves an interest in it, we should cut off ourselves from all hope of acceptance by it. We must not be understood to say, that this righteousness supersedes the *practice* of good works, (for it lays us under tenfold obligation to perform them^c) but that it excludes all *reliance* on our own works, and will on no account admit a creature's righteousness to participate the honour of justifying us before God.]

3. It is a righteousness "by faith of Jesus Christ"

[As in the foregoing expressions this righteousness is declared to be God's, exclusive of any works of man, so here we are told how it becomes ours. This part of the subject will occur again; we shall therefore only observe at present, that we must obtain an interest in this righteousness, not by working, but by believing in Christ. We must no more attempt to purchase it by our works, than to *add to it* by our works; or, if we will purchase it, we must "buy it without money and without price."^d]

To confirm the Apostle's description, we shall proceed to shew

II. What evidence we have that this is the only justifying righteousness

There will be no room left to doubt respecting it, if we consider that

^b Gal. v. 2, 4.

^c Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^d Isaiah lv. 1.

1. It was "manifested" to be so by the gospel

[This truth had been obscurely intimated under the law; but "*now*" it was fully "manifested" by the gospel. When Christ was just entering on his ministry, John Baptist pointed him out as "the Lamb of God that should take away the sins of the world."^e Christ himself declared that he was about to "give his life a ransom for many,"^f and that they were to receive the remission of sins as purchased by his blood.^g St. Peter in his very first sermon exhorted the people to believe in Christ for the remission of their sins, and declared to them that there was no other name whereby they could be saved.^h St. Paul in numberless places insists upon our seeking justification solely by faith in Christ without the smallest mixture of dependence on our own works:ⁱ and when St. Peter, through fear of the Jews, had given some reason to think that an obedience to the Mosaic ritual ought to be, or at least *might* be, added to the righteousness of Christ in order to render it more effectual, St. Paul reproved him publicly before all the church, and reminded him that all, not excepting the apostles themselves, must be justified solely by the righteousness of Christ, without any works of the law.^k Is not this a strong confirmation of the point before us?]]

2. It was "witnessed by the law and the prophets"

[The moral law may in some sense be considered as bearing testimony to the righteousness of Christ: for though it makes no express mention of it, yet, by condemning all without exception, it "shuts men up to the faith of Christ," and serves as "a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ."^j The ceremonial law in all its ordinances pointed directly to Christ. It is not possible to contemplate the Paschal lamb, or the scape-goat, or indeed any of the sacrifices or ablutions, without seeing Christ presigned by them, and confessing him to be "the end of the law for righteousness" to believing sinners.^m]

If we consult the prophets, they are unanimous in directing us to Christ. The prophecies that preceded Moses, represent Christ as the one conqueror of the serpent,ⁿ and the source of blessedness to man.^o Moses himself spake of *him* as the prophet, to whom all must look for instruction and salvation.^p Jeremiah calls him by name, "The Lord our righteousness;"^p and Isaiah represents every child of God as saying with exultation, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."^r

^e John i. 29.

^f Matt. xx. 28.

^g Matt. xxvi. 28.

^h Acts ii. 38. & iv. 11, 12.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 3—5, 14. & v. 9, 15—18.

^k Gal. ii. 14—16.

^l Gal. iii. 22—24.

^m Rom. x. 4.

ⁿ Gen. iii. 15.

^o Gen. xii. 3 & xv. 6.

^p Acts iii. 22, 23.

^q Jer. xxiii. 6.

^r Isaiah xlvi. 24, 25.]

To adduce more proofs is unnecessary, since we are assured by St. Peter, that *all* the prophets unite their testimonies to the same effects.^s What stronger evidence than this can any man desire?]

But we have further to enquire

III. How this righteousness becomes ours

Faith is the means whereby alone we obtain an interest in it

[This also is *twice* intimated in the text: nor can it be too often repeated, or too strongly insisted on. We must come to Christ as perishing sinners; and, without attempting to establish, in whole or in part, our own righteousness, we must submit to be saved by his alone.^t We must be contented to have *his* "righteousness imputed to us without works,"^u and to make his obedience the one ground of our hope.^v They alone who *thus* regard Christ, can properly be said to believe in him; and it is only when we *thus* believe, that "he is made of God righteousness unto us."^w]

On our believing, it is instantly put to our account

[This righteousness is bestowed upon us freely by God himself; it is not only given "unto" us, but is put "upon" us as a garment. In this light it is spoken of by our Lord himself, who counsels us to "buy it of him that we may be clothed, and that the shame of our nakedness may not appear."^x Without this, we are despoiled of our innocence, and exposed to shame, as our first parents were upon the introduction of sin: but as they were covered by the skins of their sacrifices according to the direction which God himself had given them,^y so are we by "putting on the Lord Jesus;"^z nor when clothed with his righteousness, can even God himself behold a spot or blemish in us.^c Hence the church rejoices with joy unspeakable,^d and is rendered meet for the presence of her heavenly bridegroom.^e]

APPLICATION

Must not the *self-righteous moralist* then stand confounded before God

[Surely it is no light matter to pour contempt on the righteousness of *God*, as though it were insufficient for us without "the filthy rags of our righteousness."^f It is no light matter to reject the united testimony of the law and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles. And as the guilt of such

^s Acts iii. 24. and x. 43.

^t Rom. x. 3.

^u Rom. iv. 6.

^v Rom. v. 19.

^y 1 Cor. i. 30.

^z Rev. iii. 18.

^a Gen. iii. 7, 21.

^b Rom. xiii. 14.

^e Eph. v. 27.

^d Isaiah lxi. 10

^c Rev. xix. 8.

^f Isaiah lxiv. 6

conduct is great, so is also the danger: and whosoever persists in it must irremediably perish.^{g]}

On the other hand, should not the *self-condemning sinner* receive encouragement from this subject?

[It is well to condemn ourselves, but not to despond. Twice it is declared in the text, that this righteousness is for “all” who will believe in Christ.^h And is it not sufficient for all? Let all then “set to their seal, that God is true.” Let them honour the righteousness of Christ by their affiance in it; and it shall be “manifested” to their consciences, no less than in the scriptures themselves, that it is complete, adequate, and effectual.]

^g Rom. ix. 30—32.

^h Compare Acts iii. 38, 39. with Isaiah i. 18. and Rom. v. 20, 21.

CCCLXXV. THE JUSTICE OF GOD IN JUSTIFYING SINNERS.

Rom. iii. 24—26. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

THE whole plan of the gospel takes for granted that we are in a lost and helpless condition. Its provisions are suited to such, and to such only. Hence the Apostle proves at large that, “we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;” and then he states, in the plainest and strongest manner, the method, which God has proposed for our restoration to his favour.

The words of the text will lead us to shew

I. In what way sinners are justified

The manner of our justification is here plainly declared

[There seems indeed a tautology in the expressions of the text; but the words are of very different import, and are necessary to convey the full meaning of the Apostle.

We are justified *without any cause^a* for it *in ourselves*: no works *before* our justification, no repentance or reformation *at the time* of our justification, no evangelical obedience *after* our justification, are at all taken into the account. There is no merit whatever in any thing we ever have done, or in any thing we ever can do. Our justification is as independent of any merit in us, as was the gift of that Saviour through whom we are justified.

Our justification also springs from *no motive in God*, except his own boundless “grace” and mercy. When speaking merely after the manner of men, we say that God consults his own glory: but, strictly speaking, he would be as happy and as glorious, if the whole human race were punished after the example of the fallen angels, as he is at present; just as the sun in the firmament would shine equally bright, if this globe that is illuminated by it, were annihilated. We can neither add to, nor detract from, God’s happiness or glory in the smallest possible degree. His mercy to us therefore is mere grace, for grace sake.]

Yet it is of great importance to notice also *the means* by which we are justified

[Though our justification is a free gift as it respects us, yet it was dearly purchased by our blessed Lord, who “laid down his own life a ransom for us.” There was a necessity on the part of God, as the moral governor of the world, that his justice should be satisfied for our violations of his law. This was done through the atoning blood of Jesus; on which account we are said to be “justified by his blood,” and to be “redeemed to God by his blood.” The Father’s grace is the source from whence our justification flows; and “the redemption that is in Christ” is the means, by which God is enabled to bestow it consistently with his own honour.

In this view the text informs us, that “God hath set forth his Son to be a propitiation, or mercy-seat,^b through faith in his blood.” The mercy-seat was the place where God visibly resided, and from whence he dispensed mercy to the people, as soon as ever the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled before him.^c But that typical mercy-seat is accessible no more: Christ is now the true mercy-seat, where God resides, and from whence he dispenses all his favours of grace and peace. God requires, however, that we should come with the blood of our great sacrifice, and sprinkle it, as it were, before him, in token of our affiance in it, and as an acknowledgment, that we hope for mercy *only* through the blood of atonement.]

^a ὥρεται. See John xv. 25. in the Greek. And for the truth of the assertion, see Tit. iii. 5.

^b ἀταπέδιον. See Heb. ix. 5. the Greek.

^c 2 Cor. v. 19.

But we are more particularly called upon to shew
II. How this way of justifying sinners consists with, and displays, the justice of God

God had exercised “ forbearance” and forgiveness towards sinners for the space of four thousand years; and was now, in the Apostles’ days, dispensing pardon to thousands, and to myriads. That, in so doing, God acted consistently with his own justice, the Apostle here *labours* to establish: he repeats it no less than *thrice* in the short space of our text. We shall therefore shew distinctly, how the justice of God is displayed

1. In the appointment of *Christ* to be our propitiation

[If God had forgiven sins without any atonement, his justice, to say the least, would have lien concealed; perhaps we may say, would have been greatly dishonoured. But when, in order to satisfy the demands of justice, God sends, not an angel or arch-angel, but his only dear Son, and lays on *him* our iniquities, and exacts of *him* the utmost farthing of our debt, then indeed the justice of God is “ declared,” yea, is exhibited in the most awful colours. The condemnation of the fallen angels was indeed a terrible display of this attribute: yet was it no proof of justice in comparison of that more conspicuous demonstration which was given of it in the death of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son.]

2. In the requiring us to *believe in him* as our propitiation

[God wills that every one should come to “ Christ” as a propitiation *through faith in his blood*, or, in other words, expressing his dependence on that blood that satisfied divine justice. As the offender under the law, when he put his hand upon the head of his sacrifice, confessed his own desert of death; and as the high priest, when he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices before the mercy-seat, confessed that the hope of all Israel was derived from that blood;^d so when we look to Christ as our sacrifice, or approach him as our mercy-seat, we must carry, as it were, his blood with us, and sprinkle it on our consciences before him, as an acknowledgment that by the justice of God we were deservedly condemned, and that we have no hope of mercy except in such a way as will consist with the immutable rights of justice. Thus it is not sufficient for *Christ* to have honoured divine justice once by enduring its penalties; but *every individual sinner* must also

^d Lev. xvi. 2. 14.

honour it for himself by an explicit acknowledgment, that its demands must be satisfied.]

3. In *pardonning sinners out of respect to this propitiation*

[That sinners are justified through Christ, may well appear an act of transcendent *mercy*: but it is also an act of *justice*; and the justice of God is as much displayed in it, as it would be in consigning sinners over to everlasting perdition. It is not an act of mercy, but of justice, to liberate a man whose debt has been discharged by a surety. But when Christ has paid our debt, and we, in consequence of that payment, claim our discharge, we may expect it even on the footing of justice itself. And whereas it is found, that no living creature ever applied to God in vain, when he pleaded Christ's vicarious sacrifice, it is manifest, that God has been jealous of his own honour, and has been as anxious to pay to *us* what Christ has purchased for us, as to exact of *him* what he undertook to pay on our behalf: so that his justice is as conspicuous in *pardonning us*, as it has been in *punishing him*.]

INFER

1. How certain is the salvation of believers!

[That which principally alarms those who stand before a human tribunal, is an apprehension that justice may declare against them. But there is no such cause for alarm on the part of a believer, seeing that justice is no less on his side than mercy. Let all then look to Christ as their all-sufficient propitiation, and to God as both "a just God and a Saviour." Then shall they find "that God is faithful and *just* to forgive them their sins,"^e yea, is "*just in justifying all that believe.*"]

2. How awful will be the condemnation of unbelievers!

[While they slight the united overtures of mercy and justice, what do they but arm both these attributes against them? Now, if they would seek for mercy, justice, instead of impeding, would aid, their suit. *At the last day*, how will matters be reverse! When justice demands the execution of the law, mercy will have not one word to say in arrest of judgment, but will rather increase the vengeance by its accusations and complaints. Let this be duly considered by us, that we may actively glorify God as monuments of his saving grace, and not passively glorify him as objects of his righteous indignation.]

CCCLXXVI. JUSTIFICATION IN A WAY THAT EXCLUDES BOASTING.

Rom. iii. 27, 28. *Where is boasting then? it is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*

IT may well be supposed, that any revelation, purporting to be from God, should, in addition to all external evidences, have internal proofs also of its divine original. Accordingly, if God should reveal a way of salvation to fallen creatures, we should of course expect it to be such a way, as should display the riches of his own grace, and secure all the glory of it to himself. Now when we look into the gospel, we find precisely such a method of salvation revealed to us. And herein it differs from all the methods that ever have been devised by man: for they uniformly reserve *a share* of the glory, at least, to the creature: whereas the gospel gives *all* the glory to God alone.

St. Paul, having opened throughout the whole preceding part of this Epistle the state of fallen man, and the way prescribed for his acceptance with God, puts this question, “Where is boasting then?” And having told us, that it is, and must for ever be, “excluded by the law of faith,” he repeats his former conclusion, and represents it as confirmed by this additional evidence of its truth; “Therefore we conclude,” &c.

In discoursing on these words we shall shew

I. That the way of salvation (whatever it may be) must exclude boasting

This will appear undeniably true, if we consider

1. The avowed design of God in the revelation he has given us

[St. Paul speaking on this subject, repeats even to tautology, that God designed from the beginning to exalt his own grace, and had so planned the way of salvation, as that every part of it might redound to his own honour.^a All possibility of glorying was studiously cut off from man. With this view

^a Eph. i. 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14. and ii. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9. especially ver. 7.

the knowledge of this salvation was imparted to the poor and ignorant in preference to the wise and noble:^b and every person that embraced it, was necessitated to seek every thing in and through Christ, that “the loftiness of man might be laid low, and that God alone might be exalted.”^{c]}

2. The disposition and conduct of all that have ever embraced it

[*Abraham*, the father of the faithful, accounted himself only “dust and ashes:”^d “nor had he any thing whereof to glory before God.”^e *Job*, “a perfect and upright man, so that none was like him upon earth,” yet spake with the utmost abhorrence of justifying himself before God.^f *David*, “a man after God’s own heart,” cries, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified.”^g *Isaiah*, that most distinguished prophet, lamented that he was vile as a leper;^h and confessed that his righteousnesses were as “filthy rags.”ⁱ *St. Paul*, who was “not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” yea, “laboured more abundantly than they all,” acknowledges himself the very “chief of sinners,”^k desires to be found in Christ not having his own righteousness,^l and boils with indignation at the thought of glorying in any thing but the “cross of Christ.”^m

If any might glory in themselves, we might suppose that the glorified saints and angels would have liberty to do so: but among them there is one only theme, “Worthy is the Lamb.”ⁿ

Now if the way of salvation (whatever it may be) correspond with God’s design in revealing it, or with the dispositions of those who have been the most distinguished ornaments of it, then it must of necessity cut off from man all occasion of glorying in himself. We may say therefore with the Apostle “Where is boasting then? It is excluded.”^j]

Having determined this point, let us proceed to enquire

II. What is that way of salvation that does exclude boasting

There are but two possible ways in which any man can be saved, namely, *by works*, or *by faith*. Many indeed

^b 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

^c Ib. ver. 30, 31. with Isaiah ii. 17.

^d Gen. xviii. 27.

^e Rom iv. 2.

^f Job ix. 2, 3, 20, 21, 30, 31, and xlvi. 6.

^g Ps. cxliii. 2.

^h Isaiah vi. 5. with Lev. xiii. 45. ⁱ Isaiah lxiv. 6.

^k 1 Tim. i. 15.

^l Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^m Gal. vi. 14.

ⁿ Rev. v. 11, 13.

have attempted to unite them; but *that* is impossible, seeing that they are distinct from, and directly opposite to each other.^o Let us then enquire which of the two excludes boasting?

1. Does the law of works?

[The law of works says, “Do this, and live.” Now suppose a man to be saved by his own obedience to this law; will he not have to boast? May he not say to a perishing fellow-creature, “I made myself to differ from you?” May he not justly take credit to himself for his own superior goodness? yea, even in heaven, may he not unite his own praises with those of his Maker, and ascribe salvation partly to himself?

It is of no use to say, that our works are only *in part* the ground of our acceptance; and that even for them we are indebted to the operation of divine grace: for, works wrought by us are *our* works; and in whatever degree they form the ground of our justification before God, in that degree (be it little or great) they give us a ground of glorying: and to deny this, is to confound grace and works, which are as distinct, and as irreconcileable with each other, as light and darkness.^p]

2. Does the law of faith?

[This says, “Believe and be saved.” By this law we are constrained to receive every thing out of the Redeemer’s fulness, and to acknowledge *him* as our “ALL IN ALL.” Nothing is left for us to ascribe to ourselves. The planning of salvation was the work of God the Father: the procuring of it was the work of God the Son: the imparting, continuing, and perfecting of it is the work of God the Holy Ghost. We cannot glory over a fellow-sinner, and say, “God had respect to my good qualities, (*either seen or foreseen*) and on account of *them* distinguished me from you;” no room is left but for shame to ourselves, and gratitude to God.

Here then we may boldly say with the Apostle, “By what law is boasting excluded? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.”]

It remains then for us to enquire

III. What conclusion we are to draw from these premises

Nothing can be more *express* than the conclusion drawn by the Apostle

[We have seen that the way of salvation (whatever it be) excludes boasting; and that salvation by *faith* is the only way that does exclude boasting: from hence therefore the con-

^o Rom. xi. 6.

^p See the preceding note.

clusion is plain, that salvation must be by faith and not by works.

But there is an emphasis in the Apostle's words which deserves particular attention. He does not merely affirm that salvation is by faith rather than by works, but by faith *exclusive of works*. No "deeds of the law" are to be added to faith in order to render it effectual: we must be saved by faith simply, by faith solely. If any work whatever be added to our faith as a joint ground of our hope, or as a motive to induce God to justify us, or as a price whereby we are to obtain an interest in Christ, "faith will be made void, and the promise will be of none effect."^q We must not trust any more in our good works than in our bad ones: for the very instant that the smallest stress whatever is laid on our good works *as procuring our justification before God*, boasting is introduced, and all hope of salvation is annihilated. Not even faith itself saves us *as a work*, but *solely as uniting us to Christ*, by whose righteousness we are justified.]

Nor can any thing be more *certain* than the conclusion drawn by the Apostle

[When men argue even from the clearest premises, we must be cautious in admitting their conclusion; because they too frequently put more into their conclusions than their premises will bear. Indeed, it is necessary to watch every step of their arguments, because of the fallacies which often escape their own observation, and would, if unguardedly acceded to, mislead our judgment. But no suspicion need be entertained respecting the point before us, since the premises are stated, and the conclusion is drawn, by God himself. If we will dispute about the one or the other, we must debate the matter with God; for it is to God's arguments, and not to man's, that our assent is now required.]

Before we conclude, we will consider some objections that may be urged against the foregoing statement. It may be said that

1. It contradicts many positive assertions of scripture

[Our Lord does, in answer to the young man's inquiry, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" say, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."^r But our Lord did not mean to say, that *he*, a fallen creature, *could* keep the commandments, so as to obtain eternal life by them: his answer was intended to shew him, that he must not seek for life in *such* a way: and, to convince him, that he had not kept the commandments so perfectly as he supposed, our Lord

^q Rom. iv. 14.

^r Matt. xix. 16, 17.

put him to the test; and gave him thereby a very convincing proof, that he must seek salvation in another way, namely, by becoming *his* disciple, and embracing *his* salvation.

There are many other passages that speak of our works being rewarded: and it is true, that works done in faith, will receive a reward of grace. But is there no difference between a *sinner's* being *justified* by the *merit* of his works, and a *justified person's* receiving a reward of *grace* on account of his works? In the one case a man may boast, that he has, *in part at least*, purchased heaven: in the other case, he must acknowledge his justification to be altogether of grace; and his increased weight of glory, to be from the superabounding riches of divine grace, *proportioned to his services*, but *not founded on his merits*.

But this matter is beyond a doubt: for we are told, that there *could not* be a law given that should give life to fallen man: and that was the very reason why a different way of salvation was prescribed to him.^s So that whatever is said in the scriptures respecting the reward which God will give to our works, we may be sure they never can be rewarded *on the ground of merit*, nor can we ever obtain life by the performance of them.]

2. It encourages people to disregard good works

[If this objection were founded in truth, we should think it sufficient to invalidate all that the Apostle himself could say in confirmation of the text: for we may be well assured, that God can reveal nothing, that in its consequences is destructive of morality. But why should it be thought injurious to good works, to affirm, that they cannot justify us before God? Is there no other end for which they should be performed, than to purchase heaven by them? Are they not necessary to prove the sincerity of our faith? Do they not honour God, and benefit our fellow-creatures, and strengthen the religious principle within us, and tend to make us *meet* for heaven, yea, and (as has been observed above) increase our happiness in heaven? If we affirm that food is of no use to clothe us, or that clothes are of no use to feed us, do we teach men to despise food and clothing, merely because we deny their utility for purposes for which they were never designed? Surely there are motives enough to the practice of good works without urging one, which, if entertained in the mind, would at once destroy all their value in the sight of God.

But let us see whether experience gives any countenance to this objection. Were Abraham, David, Paul regardless of good works, because they believed that they must be justified by faith without works? Were those who are so justly cele-

^s Gal. iii. 21, 22.

brated for their faith in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, inattentive to good works, when they choose the most cruel torments, and even death itself in preference to an accusing conscience? We may even appeal to you respecting those of our own day; Who are they that are condemned for their strictness and sanctity? they who exalt the *merit* of good works, or those who maintain justification by faith alone?

See then how little reason there is for this objection.]

In fine, we shall ADDRESS a few words

1. To those who are yet cleaving to the law of works

[None but they who are taught of God, can conceive how prone we are to self-righteousness, or how subtle are its workings in the heart. We may accede to every idea that has been suggested, and yet be secretly founding our hopes on something that we have done, or that we intend to do; or, which is the same in effect, seeking to recommend ourselves to Christ, that he may become our Saviour.

We intreat you, brethren, to be on your guard, lest, after all your good wishes and desires, you be proved to have built upon a foundation of sand, and be left to inherit your own deserts.]

2. To those who embrace the law of faith

[Much depends on your conduct: the eyes of the world are upon you; and they will be ready to spy out every blemish in you, in order to justify their rejection of your sentiments. Others may commit a thousand sins, and escape censure: but, if *you* be guilty of any thing amiss, all mouths are open, not against you only, but against your principles, and against all who maintain them. We say then, with the Apostle, "Let them that have believed, be careful to maintain good works." Be much on your guard, that you "give no occasion to the enemies to speak reproachfully:" but rather endeavour to "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well-doing." Thus will you "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour," and give a practical refutation of the calumnies that are circulated respecting you.]

CCCLXXVII. THE OFFICE AND OPERATION OF FAITH.

Gal. v. 6. *In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love.*

THE peculiar character of the gospel is, that it shews how a sinner may be justified before God—

Yet the generality of Christians are far from entertaining just views of this most fundamental point—

They confound the different offices of faith and works—

But St. Paul distinguishes them with much accuracy and precision—

He invariably declares that our justification is by faith—

Yet, though he denies to works the office of justifying, he invariably insists on them as the fruits and evidences of our faith—

Nothing can be more decisive than the declaration before us—

We shall

I. Explain it

Man is prone to trust in outward rites and ceremonies

[The Jews confided in the ordinance of circumcision—]

The Judaizing teachers also among the Christians inculcated the observance of that rite as a ground of hope—

Amongst ourselves also, many think it sufficient that they have been baptized—

Or expect to find admission into heaven because they have attended regularly at the Lord's table—]

But no outward observances can avail for our salvation

[An external conformity with the rule of duty may proceed from the basest principles—]

It may spring from a desire to obtain man's applause, or to establish a righteousness of our own—

And it may consist with the indulgence of evil tempers and vicious appetites—

It cannot therefore of itself characterize the true Christian—

Nor can it "avail *any thing*" towards procuring the divine favour—

If indeed it proceed from faith and love, it will be rewarded—

But if it be made the ground of our hope, it will prevent, rather than procure, our acceptance with God^a—]

That which alone can avail for our acceptance with God, is "faith"

[All the promises of God are made to faith^b—]

It is by faith that all the saints of old obtained salvation^c—

^a Gal. v. 2.

^b Mark xvi. 16. Acts x. 43.

^c Rom. iv. 3, 6, 7.

St. Paul and St. James do not *really* differ respecting this^d—

Nor do any passages of scripture *really* contradict it^e—

If salvation be *of grace*, it must be *by faith*^f—]

Yet this faith must be productive of good works

[It is not a mere notional assent to certain doctrines—

Nor is it a confident assurance respecting the safety of our own state—

But it is a living operative principle in the heart—

It is, on *our* part, the bond of union between Christ and our souls—

And it cannot but discover itself by “works of love”—

If it produce not holy tempers, and an unfeigned regard for the bodies and souls of men, it is no better than the faith of devils^g—]

The declaration in the text being explained, we shall

II. Improve it

Every part of scripture, rightly understood, is profitable for the directing both of our faith and practice^h—

We will improve this before us

1. “For doctrine,” that is, for the establishing of true doctrine

[The way of salvation is simply by faith in Christ—

And every kind of work, ceremonial or moral,ⁱ must be considered as of no avail with respect to justification before God—

However necessary, however valuable, our obedience may be if performed aright, it ceases to be valuable the moment we depend upon it—

This is clearly stated in the text and context^k—

And St. Paul himself was practically persuaded of this doctrine^l—

^d St. Paul (Rom. iv. 1—5.) speaks of Abraham as being justified before God: St. James (ii. 21—23.) speaks of Abraham as manifesting his faith before man, and as justifying his pretensions to the divine favour by a suitable conduct and conversation.

^e There are many expressions both in the Old and New Testament which *seem* to assert salvation by works: but they are only declarative of the character of those that shall be finally saved, or of God’s gracious determination to reward those works which flow from faith. If they were interpreted in any other way, they would invalidate the whole gospel.

^f Rom. iv. 16. ^g Jas. ii. 19. ^h 2 Tim. iii. 16. See the Greek.

ⁱ The apostle does not deny that circumcision is of any avail merely because it is a *ceremonial* work, but because it is a *work*; and because dependence on it would rob Christ of his glory. His argument therefore excludes works of whatever kind they be; Compare Gal. ii. 16.

^k Gal. v. 2—6.

^l Phil. iii. 9.

Let us then renounce all confidence in our own works—
And rely wholly on the blood and righteousness of Christ—]

2. “For reproof,” that is, for the refuting of false doctrines

[Some have argued from the text, that faith saves us *as an operative principle*—

Thus they affirm that we are justified by something *within ourselves*—

But faith, *as a principle*, is not of more value than love^m—

And if we were justified by it *as an operative principle*, we should have room to boast, just as much as we should if we were justified by love or any other principle—

The reason of our being justified by faith is, that faith unites us unto Christ, which is a property not common to any other grace—

Our works do not *make* our faith to be good or saving, but only *prove* it to be soⁿ—

If our faith be genuine we shall discover it *to God* by a simple dependence upon Christ, and *to man* by the practice of good works—]

3. “For correction” of unrighteous conduct

[It must be confessed that many profess faith in Christ while their lives are unworthy of the gospel—

But such persons stand condemned even by their own profession—

No faith is of any avail, but such as “works by love”—

Let professors then weigh themselves in the balance of the sanctuary—

Let them examine their tempers, dispositions and actions—

Let them acknowledge that a proud, envious, passionate, unforgiving, covetous or selfish Christian is as much a contradiction in terms, as an adulterous or murderous Christian—

Let them put away either their profession or their sins—]

4. “For instruction in righteousness”

[To point out all the offices of love would be tedious—

But we must observe that it should operate uniformly, and respect both the bodies and souls of men—

Let us then exercise love, and abound in it more and more^o—]

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

ⁿ Just as fruit does not *make* a tree good, but only *manifests* it to be so.

^o If this were the subject of a CHARITY-SERMON, it would be proper to open *here* the nature, excellence, and importance of the particular institution which was to be benefited: and then to exhort the benevolent in general, and believers in particular, to give it their liberal support.

CCCLXXVIII. NO REMISSION WITHOUT BLOOD.

Heb. ix. 22. *Without shedding of blood there is no remission.*

THE external administration of religion has been extremely different in different ages of the world: but the method of acceptance with God has been invariably the same. Before the Mosaic ritual was formed, pardon was dispensed through the blood of sacrifices: and since it was abolished, men obtain mercy through that blood, which the sacrifices both before and under the law were intended to prefigure:

To mark the correspondence between the sacrifices under the law, and that offered by Jesus on the cross, is the great scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the preceding context it is observed, that the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry were purged with blood; and then it is asserted as an universal truth, "that without shedding of blood there is no remission."

This assertion being of infinite importance, we shall

I. Establish it

The observances of the ceremonial law shew that men were saved by blood under the Mosaic dispensation

[For every offence, sacrifices were to be offered according to the rank and quality of the offender: and whatever animals were sacrificed, whether bullocks, goats, lambs, or pigeons, they were to be slain, and their blood was to be sprinkled both on the altar, and on the offerer: and it was by the blood so sprinkled, that the offerer was cleansed from guilt. If a person were so poor that he could not bring a pair of young pigeons, he was at liberty to offer a measure (about five pints) of fine flour: a portion of which, answerably to the destruction of the beasts, was to be burnt, in order to shew the offender what he merited at the hands of God.^a

There were indeed other purifications, some by fire, and others by water: but these were for ceremonial only, and never for moral, deflement.

Thus the law, with the one exception above mentioned, spake exactly the language of the text.]

The same way of salvation still obtains under the gospel

^a Lev. v. 6—13.

[The typical sacrifices are indeed superseded by the one sacrifice of Christ. But it is through his sacrifice, and through it alone, that any man is saved.]

This is capable of *direct* proof from scripture

[The warning which Eli gave to his sons, when they poured contempt upon the sacrifices, and caused them to be abhorred by the people, not obscurely intimated, that acts of injustice towards men might be punished by the magistrate; and yet be forgiven through the great sacrifice: but that, if any person poured contempt upon the sacrifices, he rejected the only means of salvation, and must therefore inevitably perish.^b

There is a yet stronger assertion to this effect in the chapter following the text, where it is said in the most express terms, that they who reject this sacrifice have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation; which could not be true, if there were any other way of salvation provided for us.]

It may be yet further proved by arguments, which, though of an *indirect* nature, are not less satisfactory than the foregoing

If salvation be not by blood *the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd*

[For what end could so many innocent beasts be slaughtered, and consumed by fire, if it were not to prefigure the great sacrifice? If they were intended to shadow forth the way of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, there was abundant reason for such observances: and the lives of myriads of beasts were well bestowed in such a cause. But on any other supposition the legal sacrifices, having no typical reference, were unworthy of God to institute, or of man to offer.]

If salvation be not by blood, *the prophets grossly misrepresented their Messiah*

[Christ was spoken of as “making his soul an offering for sin;” as having “our iniquities laid upon him;” as “wounded for our transgressions,” that he might “heal us by his stripes;^d it was foretold that he should “be cut off; but not for himself;” that he should “finish transgression, make reconciliation for iniquity, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness;^e yea, he was prophesied of as “a fountain that should be opened for sin and for uncleanness;^f and John, who was more than a prophet, pointed him out as that very Lamb of God, that should take away the sins of the world.^g Now what can be the meaning of these passages?

^b 1 Sam. ii. 17, 25.

^c Heb. x. 26, 27.

^d Isaiah liii.

^e Dan. ix. 24, 25.

^f Zech. xiii. 1.

^g John i. 29.

how are they applicable to Christ, if they do not mark out his atonement? and what truth is there in such representations, if we be not to seek remission through his atoning blood?]

If salvation be not by blood, *the declarations of the apostles, yea, and of Christ himself, are far more likely to mislead, than to instruct the world*

[Christ expressly told his disciples, that his "blood was shed for the remission of sins."^b And the apostles uniformly declare, that God purchased the church with his own blood;ⁱ that our reconciliation to God,^k and our justification before him,^l together with our complete redemption,^m are by blood, even by the blood of Christ, that spotless Lamb.ⁿ Is this the way to teach men that they shall be saved by their works? Must we not utterly despair of understanding any thing they have said, if we are not to expect salvation by the blood of Christ?]

The apostle's assertion being thus fully established, we shall

II. Improve it

The death of Christ has an aspect upon every thing that relates to our souls. But, not to enumerate many points, let us reflect on

1. The evil of sin

[We are assured that not one sin could have been forgiven without shedding of blood. Nor was it the blood of bulls and of goats only that was necessary, but the blood of God's dear Son, even of Jehovah's Fellow: what then must sin be, that required such a sacrifice? We behold the evil of it in the miseries that are in the world; and still more in the torments of the damned; but most of all do we see its malignity in the sufferings of the Son of God; without which not the smallest transgression could ever have been expiated. Let us then view sin in this light, and we shall no more account it a small and venial evil.]

2. The folly of self-righteousness

[Self-righteousness consists in substituting something of our own in the place of the atonement, or in blending something of our own with it. In either case we utterly make void the death of Christ.^o And what madness is this! It is, in fact, to shut ourselves out from all hope of pardon, and to rivet our sins upon our souls for ever.

It may be thought indeed that Christ died to purchase us a

^b Matt. xxvi. 28.

ⁱ Acts xx. 28.

^k Eph. ii. 16. Col. i. 20.

^c Rom. v. 9.

^m Eph. i. 7. Rev. v. 9. ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 19.

^o Gal. ii. 21.

right and power to save ourselves by our works. But if this was the case, why did St. Paul impute the rejection of his own nation to their going about to establish their own righteousness?^p and why did he desire to be found in Christ, *not having his own righteousness?*^q Why did he declare that if any man were circumcised with a view to obtain justification by the law, Christ should profit him nothing?^r Why did he contrast salvation by grace, and salvation by works, so as to shew that they could not be blended or consist together?^s This alas! is a refuge of lies, which, together with all who flee to it, will be swept away with the besom of destruction.

Let us not then dare to put ourselves in that way, wherein God declares there is no remission.]

3. The encouragement which the gospel affords to sinners

[When it is said that “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” it is doubtless implied, that through shedding of blood there is remission. And what a glorious truth is this! how refreshing to the weary soul! Let it be contemplated with holy joy, and wonder. There is no sin, however great, from which the blood of Christ will not cleanse the soul.^t David, after contracting the foulest guilt, was yet able to say, Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.^u Let every one then go to the fountain opened for sin; let him plunge, as it were, beneath that sacred flood; and he shall instantly become pure and spotless in the sight of God.^x]

4. The wonderful love of Christ

[He knew that sin could not be forgiven, unless he would take upon him our nature, and make atonement for us by his own blood. And rather than leave us to perish as the fallen angels, he accepted the hard conditions, left the bosom of his Father, put himself in our place, and submitted to endure the penalty due to sin. O what transcendent love! how inconceivable its heights, how unsearchable its depths!^y Let our minds dwell upon it continually; that our hearts being warmed with this mysterious, incomprehensible love, we may be ever vying with the hosts of heaven in singing, To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever.^z]

^p Rom. ix. 31, 32. and x. 3.

^q Phil. iii. 9.

^r Gal. v. 2, 4.

^s Rom. xi. 6

^t 1 John i. 7.

^u Ps. li. 7.

^x Eph. v. 25, 27.

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^z Rev. i. 5, 6.

CCCLXXIX. THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRUE RELIGION.

Matt. vii. 21—23. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

THE criterion, by which we are to judge of our spiritual state, is precisely the same as that whereby we determine the nature and value of things around us. As we know the different kinds and comparative excellence of trees by their fruits, so we may ascertain by our works whether we be real, or only nominal, Christians. It is by these that we shall be tried in the last day; and, according as they have been conformable or not to the will of God, will our eternal doom be fixed. Of this we are plainly warned in the words before us; which, as they cannot be rendered more intelligible, but would rather be enervated, by any attempt to explain them, we shall endeavour to impress on our minds by an application of them to our hearts and consciences. There are three distinct characters, to whom, in prosecution of our purpose, we shall address ourselves.

I. To those who make a profession of religion, but walk unworthy of it

[Our Lord not only intimates, but expressly declares, that there are “*many*” who deceive themselves in the matter of religion. It is of infinite importance therefore that we should have just and accurate notions of vital godliness; and that we should bring our experience of religion to the touchstone of God’s word. It is evident that a person may have much, which bears the semblance of piety, while he is far from feeling its genuine influence. He may say, “Lord, Lord,” that is, he may not only profess to believe in Christ, and to submit to his authority, but may profess it with considerable zeal and confidence; he may also preach, and even work miracles, in the name of Christ, and yet be destitute of that, which alone can prove him to be a true Christian. The examples of Simon Magus, and of Judas, sufficiently confirm

this melancholy truth.^a It becomes us therefore to enquire, not only what notions we entertain, but what effects they produce on our hearts and lives? Are we “doing the will of God?” Are we doing it cheerfully, uniformly, progressively? Do we walk with God, setting him constantly before us, endeavouring to approve ourselves to him in all we do, and worshipping him stately in the church, the family, and the closet? Do we act towards our neighbour, as we, in a change of circumstances, should expect him to act towards us? Do we pay a strict regard to truth and honesty in all our dealings? Do we exercise candour in judging, patience in forbearing, kindness in pardoning, generosity in relieving? In short, Is *love* the principle, that regulates all our conduct? And are we conscientiously discharging all our relative duties, as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects? Are we, moreover, duly attentive to the workings of our own hearts, in order to suppress the motions of pride, envy, malice, covetousness, impurity, or whatever else may defile the soul? Are we studious to mortify sin in the thought and desire no less than in its outward actings? Now such is the true way to judge of our state: for only in proportion as we are enabled to practise these duties, have we any scriptural evidence of our acceptance with God. We do not mean that the performance of these duties constitutes *the whole* of religion: but that our faith in Christ is of no farther value than as it manifests itself by these fruits. If we have not oil in our lamps, whereby we are enabled to make our light shine before men, we shall, like the foolish virgins, be excluded, however confidently we may knock at the gate of heaven in expectation of admittance.^{b]}

II. To those who neither practise religion nor profess it

[The text, though not so *directly* applicable to persons of this description, may yet suggest to them abundant matter for most serious reflection. While some deceive themselves by a mere profession of religion, there are others who are satisfied with declaiming against hypocrites; who, because they do not pretend to any serious religion, imagine themselves absolved from all obligations to it. But if our Lord does not approve of those who externally honour him, because their lives do not correspond with their professions, can we suppose that he approves of those who openly dishonour, and despise him? If *they* be excluded from his kingdom, shall not *these* also? If *they* be disappointed in their expectations, must not the hope of *these* also be as a spider’s web? If they who can appeal to

^a Acts viii. 13, 23. John vi. 70, 71. For further instances of false confidence see Ps. lxxviii. 35, 36. Jer. vii. 4. John viii. 39, 41, 44.

^b Matt. xxv. 11, 12. Luke xiii. 25—27.

the judge himself that they have done much for him, be bidden to depart, shall those, who have never done any thing for him, find a favourable acceptance? Let such persons then learn, that to hate hypocrisy in others is to little purpose, unless they hate it also in themselves. The same rule of judgment is established for all. We shall all receive according to what we have done, whether it be good or evil. There shall be one doom for those who abused the gospel, and for those who rejected it. If to the former it shall be said, "Depart, I never knew you," of the latter it will be said, "Bring hither those that would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."]

III. To those, who both profess religion, and adorn it by a suitable conversation

[Our Lord expressly declares, that they, who do the will of his Father, shall enter into his kingdom: and his testimony is confirmed by numberless other passages of holy writ.^c Persons of this description are extremely different from the self-deceiving professors, not only in their practice, but also in their spirit and temper. Instead of making an ostentatious parade of their religion, they are intent rather on cultivating the inward principle: instead of hastily entertaining an assured confidence, they are jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy: and instead of being forward to boast of what they have done for Christ, they are ashamed of their best services, and ready rather to dread his displeasure for what they have omitted, than to claim his favour for any thing they have done. They still have indeed many infirmities: and it is their view of these that keeps them low, and perhaps sometimes fills them with doubts and fears. But God will easily distinguish between the allowed sins of the most specious hypocrite, and the lamented infirmities of the weakest of his children: and while he says to one, Depart accursed, he will address the other in terms of approbation and complacency. Though neither leavened or blemished offerings could be presented *in sacrifice* to God, yet, if presented as *free-will offerings*, they were accepted.^d Thus shall the imperfect services of his people, if offered with a willing mind, come up with acceptance before him, and be recorded at the day of judgment as evidences of their faith and love. Let the believer then go on in a course of uniform and unreserved obedience: and let him not be discouraged because he does not possess talents that attract the admiration of men: but rather let him study to approve himself to God; and he who seeth in secret, will ere long reward him openly.]

^c Ps. xv. 1, 2. and xxiv. 3, 4. Heb. v. 9.

^d Compare Lev. ii. 11. with vii. 13. and xxii. 21—23.

CCCLXXX. BRINGING FORTH FRUIT TO OUR-
SELVES.

Hos. x. 1. *Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.*

IN order to judge aright of our actions, we must examine the principles from whence they proceed. Ignorant as we are of men's real motives, we invariably endeavour to discover them even in courts of judicature; and pass sentence, not so much upon their actions, as on their intentions. Nor does any one disapprove of this method of estimating men's conduct, provided only there be sufficient ground for discovering the real sentiments and wishes of their hearts. Now, if this be a proper mode of judging with respect to each other, we should certainly try our own actions by the same rule; since they will most assuredly be estimated according to this rule in the day when we shall stand before the tribunal of God.

In the words before us, God passes sentence, as it were, on the Israelites, not so much for the form and matter of their services, as for the dispositions they exercise in the performance of them. And as he does the same with respect to us, it is of importance to ascertain

I. When we may be said to bring forth fruit to ourselves

By the law of our creation we should regard nothing but the glory and authority of God. But, through the corruption of our nature, we have cast off God, and exalted *self* into his throne. We manifest that we do this.

1. When *self* is *the principle* of our actions

[It is but too evident that unregenerate men act in an entire conformity to their own will, without ever considering the will of God. If in any thing they seem to oppose their own will, they do so, not from a regard to his authority, but from some selfish principle of carnal hope or fear. If we would persuade them to any course of conduct, we find that the simple declaration of God's mind and will has no effect on them whatever; and that we must have recourse to carnal and temporal considerations, if we would succeed with them. Moreover they wish that others also should consult *their* will, rather than the will of God: and thus they shew not only that they are a god unto themselves, but that they would

gladly be a god also to their fellow-creatures; and have their will more respected than the will of God. What can be a proof of bringing forth fruit to themselves, if this be not?^{a]}

2. When self is *the measure* of our actions

[Many are willing to be almost Christians; but few wish to be altogether so. Herod would part with many things; but not with his Herodias. The young man would follow Christ at all events, as he thought; but could not be prevailed upon to sell his estate, and give it to the poor.^b Thus, if the attending at the house and table of the Lord, if the abstaining from gross sins, and the exercising of benevolence to the poor will suffice, many will be content to pay the price: but, the renouncing of all sin, and the walking in the narrow path of holiness and self-denial, are too irksome a task: and if they cannot maintain an interest in Christ on lower terms, they determine to part with him. Now what is this, but to make their own ease the measure of their obedience, when they ought to have no other measure than the word of God? whereas the true Christian wishes to "stand perfect and complete in *all* the will of God."^c]

3. When self is *the end* of our actions

[God's command is, that "whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God."^d But what if we be studying how to advance our own reputation or interest in the world? What if, like Jehu, we be actuated by pride, when we profess to be doing the Lord's work?^e What if, even in religious duties also, we be seeking to establish our own righteousness, or to gratify only some selfish principle?^f In all these cases we are justly involved in that censure, "All men seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's."^g]

To shew the evil of such conduct, we shall proceed to point out

II. In what respects, they who do so, resemble an empty vine

The similes of scripture, if strained and perverted, are made disgusting; but, if soberly and judiciously illustrated, they are replete with useful instruction. Now, without fear of straining this simile, we may observe, that they, who bring forth fruit to themselves, resemble an empty vine

^a Col. ii. 23.

^b Matt. xix. 21, 22.

^c 1 Cor. x. 31.

^d Compare 2 Kings x. 30, with Hos. i. 4.

^e Zech. vii. 5, 6.

^f Phil. ii. 21.

1. In its nature

[A vine is a proper emblem of fruitfulness: but an empty vine, in a country so famous for its vineyards as Palestine, gives one a very strong idea of barrenness. Hence, when God was complaining of his people's unfruitfulness, he compared them to a vineyard, which, after the greatest pains and cost bestowed on its culture, brought forth nothing but wild grapes.^g In this view, an empty vine marks the depraved nature of those, who, notwithstanding all the labour with which they have been cultivated, remain "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord:" who, instead of being "filled with the fruits of righteousness to God's praise and glory," can rise no higher than self, nor do one single act that is pleasing and acceptable to God.]

2. In its use

[A barren vine is the most worthless of all things: other trees may be made useful in some way; but neither root nor branch, nor even the trunk, of a barren vine is good for any thing.^h Such worthless creatures are they who bring forth no fruit to God. They may indeed be good members of the community; but, as to all the great ends of their creation, they are of no use whatever: they bring no glory to God; they advance not the spiritual welfare of those around them; they attain not to any measure of the divine image. There is not any thing in the whole creation that does not answer the ends of its formation better than they. Well does our Lord compare them to "salt, which, when it has lost its savour, is unfit even for the dung-hill."ⁱ]

3. In its end

[Our Lord has told us what will be the end of a barren vine.^k And shall not such also be the end of those who live to themselves rather than to God? Let our Lord determine this point also:^l and let "the unprofitable servant" not think himself secure on account of his freedom from gross sins; but remember that the best actions are to no purpose, if not wrought from a principle of love to God.^m]

ADDRESS

1. Those who resemble an empty vine

[The culture bestowed on you is worse than in vain, since it greatly aggravates your guilt. Guard then against self-deceit; and devote yourselves in body, soul, and spirit unto God. Above all, seek to be united unto Christ by faith: for it is only by virtue derived from Christ, that you can ever bring forth fruit unto God.ⁿ]

^g Isaiah v. 4.

^h Ezek. xv. 2—5.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 35.

^k John xv. 6.

^l Matt. xxv. 30.

^m 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 4. John xv. 4.

2. Those who may rather be compared to fruitful vines

[Occasional mixtures of *self* are no just ground to question our state before God: for there is much remaining weakness in the best. Nevertheless you must watch and pray against that base principle, and judge of your attainments by the degree in which *self* is mortified, and God exalted in your hearts.]

CCCLXXXI. THE MEANS OF ATTAINING TRUE WISDOM.

1 Cor. iii. 18. *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

CONCERNING the nature of true wisdom, God and the world are at issue; the wisdom of man being foolishness with God, and the wisdom of God being foolishness with man.^a To what now must this be imputed? Is there any thing in the revelation which God has given us, that is contrary to right reason? or is it that man's reason is darkened, and that his intellectual powers, no less than his bodily appetites, are depraved by sin? We apprehend that an impartial judge will not hesitate long in determining this question. But here another question arises; How shall man in his present fallen state be brought to entertain the same judgment of things as God himself does? Must he get some new faculty, whereby he shall have an additional mode of perception? or is there any way whereby his present faculties, weakened as they are, may be made to answer all the purposes for which they were originally given? To this we answer, that man does not want any new faculty, but only a new direction to the faculties he already possesses. We have a film upon the organs of vision, which needs to be removed: and for this end we must go to him who has said to us, "I counsel thee to buy of me eye-salve that thou mayest see."^b To the same effect is the advice given us in the text; "If any

^a Compare 1 Cor. i 18, 23. with iii. 19.

^b Rev. iii. 18.

man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise;" let him acknowledge, that he cannot see clearly at present; and let him submit to the operation of God's word and Spirit: thus shall the film be purged away from his eyes, and he shall "walk in the light, as God is in the light."^c

This direction, we would now submit to your consideration; and for the fulier understanding of it, we will endeavour to set before you its *meaning*, its *reasonableness*, its *importance*.

It cannot be supposed that we are to lay aside our reason: *that* were to "become fools" indeed. Reason, in those things that are *within* its sphere, is an useful, though not an infallible, guide. And, in the things that are *beyond* its sphere, it has its office: it ceases to be a guide indeed; but it becomes a companion, that must attend us every step we take, and often interpose its counsel in difficult conjunctures.

To become a fool, in the sense it is enjoined in the text, implies two things; first, *a consciousness of the weakness and fallibility of our reason, especially in things relating to God*: and secondly, *a willingness to submit our reason to the teachings of God's word and Spirit*.

That our reason is weak and fallible, we see every day and hour. How differently will men argue on the most common subjects, and yet with equal confidence of the truth of their opinions! How will those very arguments, which, under the influence of vanity, or interest, or passion, once seemed to a man unanswerable, afterwards appear to him frivolous in the extreme, when the bias that was upon his mind, has ceased to operate!

But it is in things relating to God that the fallibility of our reason more especially appears. How ignorant are the heathen world respecting the will of God, and the way in which they are to obtain acceptance with him! And how crude are the notions, which many who have the Bible in their hands, form respecting the path of duty, and the way of salvation! How absurd, for instance, was the idea that Nicodemus formed of the new birth, when he conceived it to be a repetition of a natural birth!^d

^c 1 John i. 7.

^d John iii. 4, 9.

Thus it is with many amongst ourselves: they cannot hear of the new birth, or of justification by faith, or of the influences of the Spirit, without annexing to them ideas, if not as gross, yet quite as erroneous, as those of Nicodemus. But we may presume that Christ and his apostles were right in their judgment of spiritual matters; and that others are right in proportion as they accord with them in sentiment, in spirit, and in conduct. In what light then will our boasted reason appear, if tried by this touchstone? Will not its dictates be found in direct opposition to the voice of inspiration, and consequently erroneous? Is there not such an universal departure from the scripture standard, that the few who adhere to it, are, as the prophet calls them, "Men wondered at?"^e

To become a fool then, is to feel the insufficiency of our own reason, and to be sensible that we are exceeding prone to form wrong opinions on divine subjects, insomuch that we need at all times greatly to distrust our own judgment.

But this expression implies also *a willingness to submit our reason to the teachings of God's word and Spirit*. Men who have a high opinion of their own reason, are ever ready to bring the word of God to their bar, and to pass judgment on it as true or false, according as it agrees with, or opposes, their own pre-conceived opinions. They are not contented to let reason judge, whether the revelation itself be from God or not? (*that* is its proper office, but, having acknowledged it to be from God, they proceed to determine on the points that are revealed, exactly as if they were able with their shallow reason to fathom the depths of divine wisdom.

This disposition must be mortified; and men, however learned or wise in the estimation of themselves and others, must submit to "be taught of God."^f The only use of reason, as applied to revelation, is to ascertain, Whether the revelation, purporting to be from heaven, be indeed of divine authority; and, What is the true import of that revelation in all its parts. These two points being ascertained, it is not the province of reason to judge whether

^e Zech. iii. 8.

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^f John vi. 45.

a thing confessedly revealed, be true or not: *there* faith steps in, and supplies the defects of reason; and assures the mind, that the point itself is true, because it is revealed; and that if its truth do not appear evident to the eye of reason, it is not from any irrationality in the point itself, but from a want of clearness in our reason to discern it, and a want of purity in our hearts to receive it.

Thus, to become a fool, is to take the word of God with the simplicity of a little child; to acknowledge our inability to comprehend it; and to implore of God the influences of his Spirit, that “the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may be able to comprehend the heights and depths”^g of his revealed will. In short, it is to “receive with meekness the engrailed word,”^h and to pray with Job, “What I see not, teach thou me;”ⁱ or with David, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”^k

Now it must be confessed, that this is humiliating to our proud reason; and that it is difficult for those who “seem wise in this world,” to condescend to receive instruction in such a way. But we shall find, that the apostle’s direction, if duly considered, may be vindicated (as we are in the second place to shew) on the ground of its *reasonableness*.

To become fools in order to be wise, however paradoxical it may appear, is, in the view of it before stated, most highly reasonable: for, in so doing, *we acknowledge nothing, but what is undeniably true—and submit to nothing, but what we cheerfully submit to in the acquiring of human wisdom.*

We acknowledge nothing but what is undeniably true. Let us look into the scriptures, and see how our characters are painted there. In them we are told, that “the god of this world hath blinded our eyes;”^l that “we have walked hitherto in the vanity of our mind, having our understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts;”^m that, on this very account, we

^g Eph. i. 18. and iii. 18.

^h Ps. cxix. 18.

ⁱ James i. 21.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^j Job xxxiv. 32.

^m Eph. iv. 17, 18.

need “a spirit of wisdom and revelation to enlighten us:”ⁿ that, in our conversion, our “eyes are opened,” and we are “turned from darkness unto light,”^m yea, are “brought out of darkness into marvellous light.”^p We are further told that, so far from having in ourselves a knowledge of the things of God, we do not even receive them when offered to our view; yea, we account them foolishness, neither can we know them, because we are destitute of that spiritual understanding whereby alone they can be discerned.^q

These are plain truths which require no comment.

Let us now see these truths exemplified. If we would state our argument in its most advantageous point of view, we should adduce the Gentile world as proofs of the fallibility of man’s reason; and shew, that “by wisdom they knew not God.”^r But we will waive this advantage, and take the instance of St. Paul, who had the scriptures in his hands, who was educated under the most eminent teacher of his day, and who had made a proficiency in biblical learning beyond any of his own age. With these helps, we might well expect that reason should perform its office to admiration, and prove to the world, that it was not so vitiated as some imagine. Doubtless *he*, who had the advantage of living under the brightest, fullest dispensation of gospel light, should in no respect continue in darkness: *he* must have clear views both of his duty to God, and of that method of salvation which had been typified in the scriptures, and was now made plain by the preaching of a crucified Saviour. Yet behold, this very man was grossly ignorant both of the law, and the gospel too: he knew not that the law condemned the inmost workings of iniquity in the soul;^s or that the prophecies had been accomplished in Jesus.^t Nor, unless God had caused the “scales to fall from his eyes,”^u would his reason ever have sufficed to rectify his views, or to keep him from being a self-righteous moralist, a furious zealot, and a bloody persecutor.

Thus much could reason do for *him*: “his very wisdom and knowledge, instead of guiding him aright, per-

ⁿ Eph. i. 17.

^q 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^t 1 Tim. i. 13.

^o Acts xxvi. 18.

^r 1 Cor. i. 21.

^u Acts ix. 18.

^p 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^s Rom. vii. 7, 9.

verted him,"^x " he became vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart was darkened; and professing himself to be wise, he became a fool."^y

In addition to what has been thus stated and exemplified, we will only observe, that God speaks with utter indignation against those who fancy themselves wise, or expect ever to become so by the mere exertion of their own reason; " Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt."^z

Here then permit me to ask; Does not God know more of us than we do of ourselves? and, Do not the passages that have been adduced, declare *at least* as much as they have been brought to establish? How much *more* they affirm, we shall not now enquire; but that they shew the fallibility of our reason in things relating to God, and the propriety of submitting our reason to the teachings of God's word and Spirit, no candid person will deny.

Is it not then reasonable that we should acknowledge these truths? Shall we make ourselves wiser than God? Will not the very attempt to do so be an irrefragable proof, that we are fools indeed?

But the reasonableness of becoming fools in order to be wise appears yet further, in that *it is the very thing which we cheerfully do in order to attain human wisdom.*

If a man begin to learn any science, and his preceptor tell him of some deep part of that science, which at first sight appears to involve in it a contradiction or absurdity; he does not presently determine that that point is false; but he conceives that there are things which he does not yet understand; and he contents himself with studying, in the method prescribed to him, those parts which are suited to his capacity, hoping that in due time he shall gain a further insight into those abstruser matters, and see the truth and reason of those things which he cannot at present comprehend, and which, through his ignorance of the intermediate points, he would not be able to comprehend, even if they were ever so clearly stated to him.

Now why should we not act thus with respect to reli-

^x Isaiah xlvi. 10.

^y Rom. i. 21, 22.

^z Job xi. 12.

gion? Has not that as great depths as any human science? Or rather, is it not more above the sphere of human intellect than any other science whatever?

But it will be asked, What are those first rudiments which we must understand well in order to qualify us for a deeper knowledge of the subject? To this we answer, (and O that God would impress it on all our minds!) THE KNOWLEDGE OF OURSELVES IS THE KEY TO ALL OTHER KNOWLEDGE. If we do not know by deep experience, that we are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,”^a we never can “know any other truth as we ought to know it.” On *this* the whole scripture turns. It is because of our guilt and misery, that we need the atoning blood, and unspotted righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of our blindness and pollution, that we need the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the holy Spirit. It is because we are altogether destitute of any thing that is good, that we must be saved wholly by grace, and that we must receive “Christ as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our complete redemption.”^b We may indeed obtain a head-knowledge of these things from books, while yet we remain as proud and unsanctified as the most ignorant heathen. But a real, spiritual, and saving knowledge of these things can be learned only by divine teaching, and must always be preceded by a knowledge of our own hearts: indeed, *it will always be exactly proportioned to our self-knowledge:* the more we feel ourselves destitute of wisdom, goodness, and strength, the more insight shall we have into “the deep things of God,” and the more precious will every scripture truth be to our souls.

We repeat the question then, Why should it be thought unreasonable to adopt this method of attaining heavenly wisdom, when it is the method we invariably pursue in the investigation of human sciences? Is it not reasonable that we should pay as much deference to God as to man? Or is religion alone, of all subjects, so easy to men’s apprehension, that they who have never paid attention to its first principles, are yet competent to sit in judgment

^a Rev. iii. 17.

^b 1 Cor. i. 30.

on its most mysterious truths? Surely, if a submission to any given process be judged reasonable in the prosecution of human knowledge, much more must it be so in the pursuit of that which is divine.

We must not be satisfied however with shewing the reasonableness of the direction before us; we must go on to state in the third place, *Its importance.*

Every word of God deserves our deep attention. But the exhortation in the text is singularly important; for first, *It declares the only way in which we can ever attain true wisdom.*

If we could attain the end by different means, it would be of the less consequence whether we used *these* means or not. But here is the door of knowledge; and the only question is, Whether we will enter in by it or not. It requires us to stoop, yea, to stoop much lower than we wish: but stoop we must; or else we can never gain admission to "the secrets of God's covenant."^c God holds the key of knowledge in his own hand: "he alone can give wisdom and understanding:"^d we may compass sea and land; we may learn all languages, and explore all sciences, and repeat the very scriptures themselves from beginning to end; and yet never attain true wisdom. If any man will be wise, he must become a fool, in order that he may be wise. The most learned man in the universe can know nothing *savinely* in any other way: and the weakest man in the universe shall know all that is needful for him, if he will but enter in at this door: "God will reveal to babes the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent."^e and "a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein."^f

Can any thing more strongly shew the importance of this precept, than the consideration, that none can remain destitute of true wisdom who obey it, or obtain true wisdom who despise it?

We are aware that some may ask, Are there not many persons learned in the scriptures, who yet never attained their wisdom in this way? We answer, Either they attained their wisdom in this way, or their wisdom is no

^c Ps. xxv. 14.

^e Matt. xi. 25.

^d Prov. i. 6.

^f Isaiah xxxv. 8.

other than “the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God.” We have nothing to do with individuals. The point to be resolved is, Whether God requires us to become fools in our own estimation, in order that we may be wise in his? And if he do require it, then shall men become wise in his way, or not at all.

But there is another view in which the importance of this precept will appear, namely, that *if we obey it not, our reason, instead of guiding us aright, will only mislead us more and more, and render us more obstinate in our error.*

The more confident we are respecting the truth of our present views, the more shall we regulate our conduct according to them: and consequently, if they are wrong, we shall wander further and further from the right way, and yet conceit ourselves to be in the path of duty. Moreover, God himself will give such persons up to their own delusions, as a just punishment for the pride of their hearts. The very words following the text are full to this point; “He knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain;” and again, “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.”^g Let us hear our Lord himself speaking to the Pharisees, who disdained to be taught by him: “For judgment I am come into this world; that they who see not, might see; and that they who see, might be made blind.” And when they answered with indignation, “What are we the blind persons you are speaking of?” he answered, “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.”^h

The language of the Apostle in the first chapter of this Epistle, is peculiarly strong and animated; “It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”ⁱ Thus we may ask in reference to all who will not learn in God’s appointed way, What does their wisdom do for them? Does it bring them to God? Does it enable them to overcome the world? Does it disarm death of its sting? Does it inspire them with a hope full

^g Ver. 19, 20.

^h John ix. 39—41.

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

of immortality? Does it sanctify them throughout in all their tempers and dispositions, and transform them into the image of the blessed Jesus? We may even ask, Whether, so far from loving to be taught of God themselves, they do not feel an enmity in their hearts against those who are taught of God; and account them fools, whom God declares to be the only wise?

Here then the point appears in its true light. If men will not become fools in their own estimation, they shall be fools indeed: for they shall wander incessantly “in their own deceivings,”^k and shall “perish at last for lack of knowledge.”^l

We cannot conclude this subject without observing how much light it reflects on a fact which has existed in every age of the church, which yet it is not easy to account for, namely, that few of those who are eminent for learning, are at the same time eminent for spirituality of heart and life.

St. Paul in this very Epistle says to the church at Corinth, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence.”^m Thus must we say in reference to our times, that not *many* wise, or *many* noble, are found among the despised followers of Jesus. And the reason is, that men will not condescend to be taught of God in the way that God requires: they are “wise in their own conceits;” their wisdom is even a greater bar to their salvation than their lusts: for their lusts they will condemn, even while they inwardly indulge them: but their wisdom they hold fast, nor will they part with it, even for “the wisdom that cometh of God.”ⁿ Being therefore too proud to learn, they are left in ignorance; and, stumbling at the very threshold of the sanctuary, they never enter within the vail.

^k Hos. iv. 6.

^l 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^m Jam. iii. 17.

Here then let us call to mind the first words of the text; "LET NO MAN DECEIVE HIMSELF." We all, and especially those "who seem wise in this world," are in danger of self-deception. But let us remember that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."ⁿ Let us therefore "not lean to our own understandings;"^o but, aware of the weakness and fallibility of our own reason, let us submit ourselves humbly to the teachings of God's word and Spirit.

To this advice it may be objected perhaps, That we promote an enthusiastic dependence on divine impulses; and puff up ignorant persons with spiritual pride; and discourage the pursuit of sound learning.

Let us then be heard in reply to these objections.

In answer to the first we say, that we should indeed promote enthusiasm, if we exhorted any one to follow influences that were independent of the written word: but if we recommend all persons to regulate their sentiments *solely* by the written word, and to rely on the influences of the holy Spirit *no further than they accord with that*, then neither we, nor they, are in any danger of enthusiasm, because the sacred oracles are an unalterable standard, to which every thought and action may be brought, and by which its quality may be infallibly determined.

With respect to the encouraging of spiritual pride, surely the inculcating of humility is a strange way of promoting pride. Suppose we were to tell men that their own reason is sufficient for every purpose of spiritual instruction; and that they were at liberty to weigh every truth of scripture in their own balance, and to admit, or alter, or expunge whatever accorded with, or opposed, their own sentiments; then indeed there were some foundation for the objection. But when we recommend a cheerful submission to the voice of inspiration, and an humble dependence on God's promised aid, we cut up pride by the very roots, and lead men to confess, that all their sufficiency is of God alone. And if any pervert this doctrine to the fostering of their own pride

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 25.

^o Prov. iii. 5.

(and what doctrine is there that has not been perverted?) the fault is not in the doctrine itself, but in those who abuse it: and if an argument from the abuse of a thing be valid, we must then give up the Bible itself; since every doctrine in it has been more or less abused.

Lastly, as to the discouraging of sound learning, how can that be a consequence of the foregoing statement? We have not insinuated that worldly wisdom is unnecessary for worldly purposes, but only for the attainment of divine knowledge: and therefore we can no more be said to speak against human wisdom because we deny the necessity of it in order to the attainment of that which is divine, than we could be said to decry divine wisdom, if we should deny that to be necessary in the investigation of human sciences. Nor have we intimated that human wisdom is of little value for the elucidating of the scriptures; for most assuredly it is of exceeding great value in this view, especially when used in conjunction with, and in subserviency to, divine wisdom. And lest any one should conceive, that deductions, unfavourable to the pursuit of literature, should appear to be authorized by this discourse, we declare unequivocally, that it is the duty, the indispensable duty, of all students, whatever be the sphere in which they are afterwards to move, to cultivate human wisdom, and with all diligence to prosecute the work assigned them, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." We do not hesitate to say, that they would be culpable in the highest degree, if they should make religion a pretext for neglecting their academical studies. We would solemnly exhort them all to remember, that, as in *our* families, so also in *God's* family, every servant best executes *his Master's will, when he is most attentive to the duties of his place and station.*

Having thus endeavoured in few words to obviate such objections as were likely to arise, what remains, but that we intreat those who think themselves wise, to become fools in their own sight; and those who feel that they "lack wisdom, to ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and without upbraiding."^p

CCCLXXXII. THE SELF-FLATTERING DELUSIONS OF SINNERS EXPOSED.

Ps. xxxvi. 2. *He flattereth himself in his own eycs, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.*

IT may well astonish us to see how careless and indifferent men are about the favour of God. But the Psalmist assigns the true reason for it. Every one cherishes in his mind some delusion, whereby he lulls his conscience asleep; and thus, notwithstanding his guilt and danger, rests satisfied with his state, till God himself interpose, in a way of mercy or of judgment, to undeceive him:

To elucidate his words, we shall

I. Point out some of the self-flattering delusions which are commonly entertained

We shall notice some which obtain

1. Among the careless world

[They imagine that God does not regard the conduct of his creatures^a— — — Or, that he is too merciful to consign them over to everlasting perdition^b— — — Or that, at least, a little repentance will suffice^c— — — Or that, at all events, it is time enough yet to think of turning seriously to God^d— — —]

2. Among those who profess some regard for religion

[They judge that a moral conduct, with a regular observance of the outward forms of religion, is all that is required^e— — — Or, that the embracing of the truths of the gospel, and joining themselves to the Lord's people, is a true and scriptural conversion^f— — — Or, that the having, at some for-

^a Job xxii. 13. Ps. xciv. 7. But it is a sad delusion, Prov. xv. 3. 1 Cor. iv. 5. Eccl. xii. 14. Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^b Zeph. i. 12. 2 Pet. iii. 4. But this is also a fatal error, Ps. ix. 17. and 2 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6, 9.

^c Repentance is not so small a thing as men suppose. It is nothing less than a thorough renovation of the heart in all its powers; a putting off the old man, and a putting on the new, John iii. 3. Eph. iv. 22—24.

^d Acts xxiv. 25. If other delusions have proved fatal to thousands, this has destroyed tens of thousands. The folly of it appears from James iv. 14. Luke xii. 20. and Gen. vi. 3. Prov. i. 24—31.

^e Our Lord warns us against this mistake, Matt. v. 20.

^f But what did this avail the foolish virgins? Matt. xxv. 1—12. or Judas? xxvi. 21—24. See also, Matt. xiii. 30, 40, 41, 42.

mer period, had their affections strongly exercised about religious things, is a proof of their present acceptance with God^g— — — Or, that a present pleasure in religious duties, with a partial mortification of sin, is a sufficient evidence of their sincerity^h— — —]

But the vanity of these delusions will appear, while we
II. Shew when and how they shall be removed

The eyes of all will sooner or later be opened, and their vain conceits be dissipated

1. Some will have their errors rectified *in conversion*

[When the Spirit of God enlightens the mind of man, he scatters the clouds of ignorance and error; and, as far at least as respects the foregoing delusions, guides them into the knowledge of the truth. He shews us, not only that our sins are known to God, but that we are in danger of condemnation on account of them, and that we ought to turn to God instantly, and with our whole heartsⁱ— — — He discovers to us also, that no form of godliness, no change of sentiment, no moving of the affections, no partial reformation of the life, will suffice; but that, if we will serve the Lord in truth, we must give up ourselves wholly to him and without reserve^k— — — Particularly he makes us to see “*the hatefulness*” of the most refined hypocrisy, and even of the remains of sin, which, in spite of our most earnest endeavours to destroy it, yet war in our members^l— — —]

2. Others will have their misapprehensions removed *in condemnation*

[Too many, alas! hold fast their delusions in spite of God’s word, and all the merciful or afflictive dispensations of his providence. But, as soon as ever they come into the eternal world, they will be undeceived. The sight of a holy God, together with the hearing of that sentence which their once compassionate, but now indignant, Judge will pass upon them, and, above all, the feeling of the torments of hell, will convince them of their mistakes, and leave them no room to doubt, but that the care of the soul was “the one thing needful,” and that every word of God shall be fulfilled in its season — — —]

^g Such notions are common, Matt. xiii. 20, but awfully delusive, Heb. vi. 4—6. 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^h This is the thought of many, Isaiah lviii. 2, 3. Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35. But nothing less than an uniform and unreserved obedience to God will prove us to be God’s children, 1 John iii. 7. Mark ix. 43—48.

ⁱ Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30.

^k Ps. xviii. 23. and Heb. xii.

^l Ps. lxxvi. 18. James i. 26. Job xlvi. 6. Rom. vii. 21—24.

ADVICE**1. Confer not with flesh and blood in the concerns of religion**

[All unregenerate men endeavour to bring down the word of God to some standard of their own; and consequently will discourage in us every thing that goes beyond the line which they have drawn for themselves. But, if they deceive us, they cannot afford us any remedy in the eternal world. The word of God is the only standard of right and wrong; and by that we shall be judged in the last day. Let us therefore regulate our sentiments and conduct, not according to the opinions of fallible men, but according to the unerring declarations of God himself. And instead of endeavouring to lower the demands of God to our wishes or attainments, let us labour to raise our practice to the strictest requisitions of God's law.^m]

2. Pray for the teaching of God's Spirit

[With deceitful hearts, a subtle adversary, and a tempting world, we are continually in danger: nor can we hope to be guided aright but by the Spirit of the living God. Even the scriptures themselves will be "a dead letter," and "a sealed book" to us, unless the Spirit of God open our understandings to understand them. He has promised to lead us into all truth; and, if we be really disposed to embrace the truth, he will discover it to us. But if, through our hatred of the light, we shut our eyes against it, God will give us over to our delusions, that we may believe a lie.ⁿ Let us therefore guard against self-deception, and submit ourselves to the guidance of God's Spirit. Then, though our capacities be ever so small, we shall be kept from every fundamental error,^o and be "made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ."]

3. Seek above all to know the hatefulness of sin

[Nothing but a discovery of the evil of sin will effectually preserve us from self-deceit. To produce this, is the first saving work of the Spirit: and the more this is wrought in the heart, the more shall we be on our guard against all self-flattering delusions.]

^m Phil. iii. 13, 14.

ⁿ John iii. 19. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^o Isaiah xxxv. 8. and Matt. xi. 25.

[and Is. lxvi. 3, 4.]

CCCLXXXIII. AN ENQUIRY INTO OUR VIEWS OF CHRIST.

Matt. xxii. 41, 42. *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ?*

THEY who are prejudiced against the gospel, are ever studious to ensnare the preachers of it with captious, or, as they think, unanswerable questions—

To such cavillers we should answer warily, and with meekness of wisdom—

Nor will it be unuseful, on some occasions; to propose to them in return some question, which shall lead their thoughts into a better channel—

Our blessed Lord adopted this method after he had been successively interrogated by Pharisees, Herodians, and Scribes^a—

He returned to each a satisfactory answer, and silenced them at last by proposing to them a difficulty, which, with all their boasted wisdom, they were unable to solve—

In discoursing on his address to the Pharisees, we shall point out

I. The scope of his question

The Pharisees could not reconcile our Lord's mean appearance with his high pretensions—

Our Lord therefore shewed them

I. That there were many apparent contrarieties in the prophetical representations of the Messiah

[The Messiah is sometimes spoken of as a new-born infant, and sometimes as the mighty God^b—

He is represented as an object of contempt and abhorrence, and yet as an object universally admired and adored^c—

Sometimes he is said to live for ever, and sometimes to die an accursed death^d—

He is called the Lord, and yet the son, the root, and yet the offspring, of Davide^e—

^a "Master, what thinkest thou of paying tribute to Cæsar? ver. 15, 17. of the resurrection of the body? ver. 23—38. of the commandments? ver. 35, 36. ^b Isaiah ix. 6.

^c Isaiah liii. 3. and xlix. 7. Ps. xxii. 6. with Ps. lxxii. 8, 10, 11.

^d Ps. lxxii. 15, 17. and lxxxix. 21—29, 33—37. with Isaiah liii. 4, 5, 12. last clause.

^e Ver. 43—45. Rev. xxii. 16.

Nothing can be conceived more opposite than the characters which were thus represented as combined in the person of the Messiah—

But the Pharisees noticed only those passages which flattered their pride, and raised their expectations of temporal grandeur—

Our Lord therefore directed their attention to other prophecies, which described the Messiah in a more humiliating view—]

2. That his apparent meanness was no just ground for their rejecting his pretensions to that character

[The miracles of our Lord had given abundant evidence of his divine mission—

On account of *them* therefore they were bound to believe in him—

But his humiliation was as clearly foretold as his power and glory—

And the accomplishment of it in his outward state was an additional reason for their acceptance of him—

A due attention to the scriptures, which they professed to understand and explain, would lead them to a discovery of this truth—

Hence our Lord, solicitous not merely to confound, but rather to convert and save them, directed their thoughts to the point before us—]

Such being the scope of our Lord's question, let us consider

II. The importance of it

In this question is involved all the glory of Christ, and all the salvation of man

1. On the union of the divine and human natures the sufficiency of Christ depends

[If he was a mere creature, *his obedience could not merit any thing for us*—

All that he could do would have been no more than his bounden duty; and after having done all, he would have been only an unprofitable servant—

Neither could his sufferings have made an atonement for our sins—

There is no proportion whatever between the sufferings of one creature for a time, and the sufferings of myriads of creatures to all eternity—

Nor is there any such distance between the highest and the

^f Luke xvii. 10.

lowest of creatures, but that they must be equally unable to take away the sins of a ruined world—

Moreover, *his intercession would be utterly unavailing on our behalf*—

It is the sufficiency of his atonement to satisfy the demands of law and justice, that forms the basis of his intercession—

Let that foundation be sapped by a denial of his Godhead, and the whole superstructure must fall at once—

On the other hand, if he be God as well as man, his obedience, his sufferings, and his intercession are exactly such as God's honour, and man's necessities, required—]

2. On our knowledge of this union the salvation of man depends

[Without such a view of Christ, we can form no just notion of his character—

As we should be wholly ignorant of man's nature, if we supposed him destitute of a soul, so should we be of Christ's nature, if we were unmindful of his divinity—

Without such a view of him we cannot feel a suitable disposition of mind towards him—

However grateful we might be to a creature who should die for us, we must be infinitely more so for such a favour conferred on us by almighty God—

Without such a view of him we cannot wholly depend upon him—

Our dependence on a creature must be limited; for, if it be unlimited, instead of saving us, it will subject us to God's heavy displeasure^h—

But, to obtain salvation through him, we must know him clearly, love him supremely, and depend on him wholly—

Whereas, if we think of him only as a creature, our knowledge of him must be confused, our gratitude feeble, and our dependence vain—]

APPLICATION—WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

1. Do ye think of him at all?

[Alas! how many are there who think no more of him than if he never had come into the world!—

If all the *heathens* who forget God their *Creator*, must be turned into hell, what must be the portion of professing *Christians*, who forget God their *Redeemer*?ⁱ—]

2. Do you think of him agreeably to his august character?

[Many consider him only as a good man, and a prophet—

^g Heb. x. 4.

^b Jer. xvii. 5.

ⁱ Ps. ix. 17. with Heb. ii. 3.

But these are disparaging thoughts, which he will fearfully resent—

You never can think of him aright, unless you consider him as “*God manifested in the flesh,*” and “*purchasing the church with his own blood*”—]

3. Do ye think of him with the affections due to that character?

[With what holy awe, what fervent love, what devout adorations should we behold our incarnate *God!*—

And how contemptuous is our treatment of him, if our thoughts of him be not accompanied with such emotions!—

It may be that some feel condemned by these observations, while they feel that they *desire* to love him with their *whole* heart—

Let such then know that their *desires* are accepted and shall be fulfilled—

And, instead of imagining that Christ has no love to them, let them be assured that his thoughts respecting them are most affectionate, and his designs towards them most benevolent^k—

Yea, if all of us would reflect more diligently on the account which the scriptures give of him, he would soon discover to us his beauty, and make us partakers of his glory—]

^k Jer. xxix. 11.

CCCLXXXIV. THE MANIFESTATION WHICH CHRIST HAS GIVEN OF THE FATHER.

John i. 18. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

The knowledge of God is the great source of blessings to mankind—

But the heathen world were altogether ignorant of him—

Nor were the Jews themselves fully instructed concerning him—

To make a full revelation of him to the world was a part of that work which was reserved for Christ himself—

And this office he performed, to the unspeakable comfort of this church and people—

The Evangelist unites his testimony with that of John the Baptist in confirmation of this truth—

We shall enquire

I. What Christ has declared of the Father

God himself is invisible to the eye of sense^a—

Even Moses was permitted to see only his back parts^b—

But Christ had a peculiar relation to the Father as “his only begotten son;” and a most intimate acquaintance with him, as being from all eternity, and at that very hour, “in his bosom”—

He has made known the Father to us, and declared

1. His nature

[Mankind had gross conceptions of the Deity as a material being—

But Christ has assured us of his perfect spirituality^c—

Nor was the Unity of God clearly ascertained among the Gentiles—

But Christ has left no room for doubt upon this subject^d—

He has moreover revealed to us a Trinity of persons in the Godhead—

He has affirmed in the plainest terms his own Oneness with the Father^e—

He has spoken of the Holy Ghost as co-existing with himself and with the Father^f—

And has joined the Three together as equal in authority and honour^g—

Thus has he enabled us by faith to “see him who is invisible”—]

3. His perfections

[God had long since proclaimed his own name to Moses^h—

But Christ has afforded us more abundant discoveries of all his attributes—

He has clearly shewn us that his goodness is unbounded,ⁱ his sovereignty uncontrollable,^k his power irresistible,^l his justice inflexible,^m his mercy infinite,ⁿ and his truth inviolable^o—

^a 1 Tim. vi. 16.

^b Exod. xxxiii. 23.

^c John iv. 24.

^d Mark xii. 29.

^e John x. 30.

^f John xv. 26.

^g Matt. xxviii. 19.

^h Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

ⁱ Matt. v. 45.

^k Matt. xi. 25. 26.

^l Matt. xxvi. 53.

^m Ib. 42.

ⁿ John iii. 16, 17.

^o Luke xvi. 17.

'There is not any thing relating to his Father, the knowledge of which could be at all serviceable to us, that he has not revealed^p—]

He did not however merely utter these things like the prophets of old

II. How he declared him

Christ had formerly spoken of God in and by the prophets^q—

But now he declared the Father in a different manner

1. By exhibiting a perfect pattern of him

[He was himself an exact resemblance of the Father^r—

And in his conduct exhibited every perfection of the Deity^s—

Hence a sight of him was, in fact, a sight of the Father himself^t—]

2. By making known his counsels

[Much of the Father's counsels had been hid from the foundation of the world, or had been very imperfectly revealed—

Christ opened them to his hearers as they were able to bear them^u—

He made known God's intention to admit the Gentiles into his church^x—

And assured us that the most abandoned of mankind should be cordially received the very instant he returned to God^y—

But that none of whatever character could be saved, unless they sought acceptance with God through his mediation^z—

Thus by these declarations he has enabled us to attain a more perfect knowledge of the Father's mind and will—]

3. By exerting a secret energy on the minds of men

[No man could know the Father unless Christ revealed him inwardly by his Spirit, as well as outwardly by the word^a—

His very disciples understood not until he opened their eyes^b—

Nor can we attain to a true knowledge of God in any other way—

The "word must come to us in power and in the Holy Ghost," or it will come in vain^c—

^p John xv. 15.

^q 1 Pet. i. 11.

^r Heb. i. 3.

^s John viii. 29.

^t John xiv. 7—9.

^u John xvi. 12.

^x Matt. viii. 11, 12.

^y Luke xv. 20.

^z John xiv. 6.

^a Matt. xi. 27.

^b Luke xxiv. 45.

^c 1 Thess. i. 5.

But when applied by his Spirit, it shall teach us plainly of the Father^d]—

INFER

1. How glorious a person must Christ be!

[The description given of him shews his superiority above every created being—

He is not the Son of God by creation, as the angels are, nor by regeneration and adoption, as men; but by an inexplicable generation, his “only-begotten”—

And, as well in his incarnate as in his pre-existent state, was continually “in the bosom of the Father”^e—

Nor was any other worthy to reveal the Father to us—

Let us then entertain just conceptions of his worth and dignity—

And manifest our delight in him as the saints in heaven did^f]—

2. How precious ought the scriptures to be to us!

[Job and David had but a small portion of the scriptures in their hands—

Yet did they value them above every thing in the world—

How much more should we, who possess the sacred oracles entire!—

In these is recorded every thing that Christ has declared—

And by these we may be made wise unto salvation^h—

Let us then search them with diligence, and treasure them up in our hearts—

Nor let a day pass without digging into those invaluable minesⁱ]—

3. How inexcusable are they who are ignorant of God!

[It is to our shame that many of us are still ignorant of God^k—

We have not that knowledge of him that produces correspondent affections towards him—

But what excuse can we offer in extenuation of our guilt?—

Has not Christ declared the Father in order that we might know him?—

And is he not willing also to reveal him in us by a powerful energy on our souls?—

Some, doubtless, are more guilty than others in proportion as they have possessed means of instruction—

^d John xvi. 25.

^e John iii. 13.

^f Rev. v. 5—9.

^g Job xxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 72.

^h 2 Tim. iii. 15.

ⁱ Prov. ii. 4.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 34.

But all will find the consequences of their ignorance most tremendous!—

Let all begin then to enquire after God with their whole hearts—

Nor rest till they have attained that knowledge of him which is life eternal^m]—

^l 2 Thess. i. 8.

^m John xvii. 3.

CCCLXXXV. NO WAY TO GOD BUT THROUGH CHRIST.

John xiv. 6. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

THERE is in the Christian church a great diversity of character: some, like Nebuchadnezzar's image, have heads of gold, while their feet are of materials, as unstable as they are unsuitable, even of iron and clay. Others are upright in their conversation, while yet their views of divine truth are very imperfect. Such the apostles shewed themselves all the time of our Lord's sojourning on earth: nor could the plainest instructions wholly eradicate the errors in which they had been educated from their earliest years. Our Lord had just informed them, that he was about to die, and to go to his Father; and that he would soon come again and receive them to himself that they might be with him for ever. And, knowing that, *in general*, they were acquainted with his intentions, he said, “ Whither I go, ye know; and the way ye know.” But, alas! though this was true *in the general*, their minds were at present so engrossed with the notion of an earthly kingdom, that they supposed him to be speaking of some great palace, where he was about to erect his standard. Hence St. Thomas requested further information: to which our Lord replied in the explicit manner related in the text.

In discoursing on his words, it will be proper to consider

I. Our Lord's description of himself
He speaks of himself as

1. The way

[The first way to heaven was, by the covenant of works. But, when man had sinned, that way was closed for ever.^a From that time another way was opened, through the incarnation and sufferings of God's only Son. This was announced to the unhappy pair, who were informed, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." To him therefore they were to look as their mediator and advocate, and through him they were to obtain reconciliation with God. There were two obstacles, to their re-admission to the divine favour: these were, guilt and corruption. But both of these were to be removed by Jesus; the former by his blood, the latter by his Spirit. Thus is Christ *our* way also to the Father, making atonement for us by his meritorious death, and renewing us by his all sufficient grace.^b]

2. The truth

[As the disciples might not be able to reconcile this with the ceremonial law, which appeared to prescribe other means of access to God, our Lord informed them that the legal sacrifices were only shadows, of which he was the substance; and figurative representations, of which he was the *truth*. There had been many persons raised up as saviours and deliverers. Many different things also were intended to mark out the way of salvation: the manna from heaven; the water from the rock; the brazen serpent; the daily sacrifices, with innumerable others; but they all pointed at him as the one *true* source of reconciliation, of healing, of spiritual vigour, and of eternal salvation. He was the one scope and end of all, in whom all were united; from whom all derived their efficacy; and by whom they all were both accomplished and annulled.]'

3. The life

[It would have been to but little purpose to direct his disciples in what way to go, if he had not told them how they might obtain life and strength to walk in that way. They, as well as all others, were by nature *dead* in trespasses and sins. Jesus therefore added yet further, that he was "the life." By this we are not to understand merely that Jesus is the author and giver of life; but that he is really to the soul what the soul is to the body. Without the soul, the body is altogether motionless and senseless. It is the soul that animates, as it were, the different members, and enables them to perform their proper functions. So, without Christ, the soul has

^a Gen. iii. 24.

^b Amidst a multitude of passages to this effect, see Eph. ii. 13, 16, 18, and Heb. x. 19, 20.

no spiritual motion or perception: it is from its union with Christ that it has a sufficiency for any thing that is good.^e Christ must live in the soul, as the soul does in the body. If we live, it is not *we* that live, but Christ that liveth in us.^d Hence he both calls himself,^e and is called by others,^f "our life."]

This description will appear of the greatest importance, if we consider

II. His declaration founded upon it

Many are the ways which men have devised of coming unto God

[Some have sought for mediators among their fellow-creatures. Others have trusted in their own repenances and reformations———Innumerable are the refuges of lies in which sinners have sought to hide themselves from the displeasure of God———]

But there is no way to God but through Christ

[Nothing can be plainer than our Lord's assertion. If we ask, What is the way to God? He answers, "I am." If we enquire, What other way there is? He answers, "None." If we wish to be informed whether there be not some exception in favour of those who have served God from their earliest infancy, as Timothy, or to the most advanced age, as John? the answer is, "No:" "no man cometh unto the Father but by me:" Timothy must come as Mary Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were cast; and John, as the thief, who died a few hours after his conversion. All need equally to have their guilt expiated, and their hearts renewed: and there is none but Jesus who can do either the one or the other of these things for us: *therefore* there is no other name or power but his, that can ever save us.^g]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are ignorant of the Saviour

[Have you so little concern for heaven that you will not enquire the way thither? Or do you suppose that a life of worldliness and carnal ease is the path that leads to God; and that men will find it, as it were, blindfold? If this were the case, Jesus would never have become incarnate, and died upon the cross, to open a way for you; nor would he have warned you to the contrary in such solemn terms as those before us. Consider this, for every tittle of his word, whether credited or not, shall be fulfilled.]

^e John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f Col. iv. 4.

^d Gal. ii. 20.

^g Acts iv. 12.

^e John xi. 25.

2. Those who desire to come to God

[Beware lest you attempt for a moment to find any other way than that marked out for you by Christ. He must be your *only* way of access to God. We do not say that you are not to walk in the way of holiness, (for the scripture asserts the contrary in the strongest terms^h) but this we say; It is the blood of Christ, and not your own holiness, that must reconcile you to God; and it is the spirit of Christ, and not your own natural powers, that must enable you to believe in him, or to serve him. Submit to this at once;ⁱ for you must be brought to it, if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven. You cannot come to God in prayer, but by Christ; much less can you be admitted to him in heaven. Even Christ himself, as the sinner's representative, entered into heaven by his own blood:^k thing not therefore that *ye* shall enter in by any other way.]

3. Those who have already come to God

[Yes; blessed be God, many have come, through Christ as their way, and by Christ as their life: and O, whither are they going? to their Father's house, whither Christ is gone before to prepare a place for them! What a joyful thought! every day and hour brings them nearer to their home! and, for aught they know, they may arrive at those blissful mansions within the space of a few months, or days, or even hours! Regard not then if your road be occasionally rough; but keep in it; press forward; turn not from it even to the end; and, "when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."]

^h Isaiah xxxv. 8.

ⁱ Rom. x. 3.

^k Heb. ix. 12.

CCCLXXXVI. CHRIST THE ONLY FOUNDATION.

¹ Cor. iii. 11. *Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

THERE is not any thing more injurious to the church of God than a party-spirit: yet even in the apostolic age did it begin to distract the Christian community. At Corinth it prevailed, and rose to an alarming height: and St. Paul was obliged to exert all his influence in order to counteract it. He reminded the partisans, that, as "God's building," they should be cemented together

with brotherly love: that they should study to shew themselves worthy of the place they held in the church, in expectation of that day when all their works should be tried by fire: and that, instead of fomenting strifes and divisions, they should unite with each other in cleaving stedfastly to the one foundation, whereon they stood.

The declaration in the text is plain, and of infinite importance

To enter more fully into it we shall consider

I. What foundations men lay for themselves

Every man has some foundation for his hope. Though there are many shades of difference in the sentiments of different men, yet their grounds of hope may be reduced to two;

1. Their own goodness

[Some think that nothing but gross sin can expose them to the wrath of God. They therefore congratulate themselves as having never done any thing to merit his displeasure. Others imagine that they may trust in the good works that they have done. They have, in their own apprehension, been regular in their duties to God and man: nor can they conceive that *they* should have any reason to fear. Thus, like the Pharisee of old, they thank God that they are not as other men; and are filled with self-complacency, because they are punctual in the observance of certain duties.^a]

2. Their own works and Christ's merits united

[Many, who see, that their own works cannot justify them according to the strict tenor of the law, yet hope that they will, according to the milder demands of the gospel. If they see that these will not suffice, they will look to Christ to supply their deficiencies. If they see, that such an union is impracticable, and, that Jesus must be their only foundation, they hope, however, that he will save them for their works sake. Thus they either avowedly profess to participate with Christ the honour of their salvation; or, while they pretend to give the honour of it to him, they look for the original and moving cause of it within themselves. Like the Judaising Christians,^b or the Gentiles whom Peter misled,^c they unite the law to Christ; as though Christ needed to have something

^a Luke xviii. 11, 12.

^b Acts xv. 5.

^c Gal. ii. 12, 14.

superadded to him, to render his death effectual. At all events, if they find their error in this respect, they will regard their works as *their warrant* to believe in Christ; and will expect mercy at his hands, not so much because his grace is free and all-sufficient, as because they have something in themselves, which may deserve his notice and regard.]

These plans of salvation however will be found very erroneous, if we enquire

II. What is that foundation which God has laid

Nothing can be more clear, than that he has not laid either of those, which have been before mentioned

[He often describes his people as performing good works: and often promises them, under that character, eternal life. But he always represents us as sinners, and as standing in need of his mercy. And he has sent his Son into the world for that very reason, because none could obtain mercy by any works of their own. Nor has he less clearly shewn, that works are *wholly* to be excluded from the office of justifying. He has told us that salvation must be wholly of grace or wholly of works.^d That every degree of boasting is excluded from that salvation which he has revealed.^e And that the persons, whom he justifies, are ungodly, and without any works whatever to recommend them.^f]

Christ is the one foundation which he has laid in Zion

[He “has set forth his Son to be a propitiation for sin:” and every sinner is to build his hope on Christ alone. Christ is the foundation laid in the covenant of grace.^g The same is laid in all the promises.^h The same was exhibited in all the types.ⁱ The same is laid also in the gospel.^k We are expressly told that there is no other!^j Nor indeed can there be any other to all eternity.]

The necessity of building upon this will appear, while we consider

III. Why no other can be laid

Many reasons might easily be assigned: but one or two may suffice

^d Rom. xi. 6. ^e Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. ^f Rom. iv. 5.

^g Gen. xvii. 19. Heb. viii. 6.

^h Gen. iii. 15. and xxii. 18. 2 Cor. i. 20.

ⁱ The Paschal Lamb, the Scape Goat, &c.

^k 1 Pet. ii. 4—6.

^j Acts iv. 12.

1. Any other would be unworthy of the divine architect

[God himself is the architect;^m and must have all the glory of beginning and perfecting this building. But, if men were to found their hopes on any thing but the Lord Jesus Christ, they would have whereof to glory.ⁿ So far as respect was had to any merit in them, so far might they ascribe the honour to themselves. Even in heaven their song must differ from that of the redeemed. Instead of giving *all* the glory to God and to the Lamb,^o they must take a portion of it to themselves. But this would be utterly unworthy of God to suffer. Indeed he has told us that he never can nor will suffer it.^p We may be sure therefore that no such way of salvation shall ever be established, as leaves man at liberty to boast. We shall be rewarded *according to* our works, and in some respect *for* our works; but the only ground of acceptance, either for our persons or our services, is in Christ alone.^q]

2. No other would support the weight that is to be laid upon it

[Whatever our souls need in time or eternity must be derived from that, which is the foundation of our hope. Our pardon must be obtained by it; our peace flow from it; our strength and righteousness be given us on account of it; and eternal glory be bestowed on us, as the reward of it. And can we build our hope of such things in any degree on our own works? Can we, who, if we had done all that is commanded us, should be only unprofitable servants, imagine, that we can in any respect merit such things, when we have done nothing that is commanded us, at least, nothing perfectly, or as we ought to have done it? Surely such an hope would soon appear to be a foundation of sand; and would infallibly disappoint us to our eternal ruin. Yea, the very persons who build on such a foundation, almost invariably deny, that any man can be assured of his acceptance with God; they account such an assurance to be an enthusiastic delusion; which is a clear acknowledgment of the insufficiency of *their* foundation to bear this weight.]

INFER

1. How needful is it to enquire what foundation we are upon!

[If we build but a common habitation, we are careful on what foundation we raise it. How much more care should

^m Ver. 9.

ⁿ Rom. iv. 2.

^o Rev. v. 13.

^p 1 Cor. i. 29, 31. Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^q Eph. i. 6.

we exercise, when we are building for eternity! Let us enquire, whether we have been deeply convinced of the insufficiency of our own goodness, and of the impossibility of uniting any works of ours with Christ's atoning sacrifice? And let us examine whether Christ's obedience unto death be our only hope, our only confidence? We never can be saved, unless, with Paul, we utterly renounce the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and desire to be found clad in Christ's unspotted robe.^r]

2. How secure are they who are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ!

[Christ, on whom they stand, is justly called “*a tried stone, and a sure foundation.*”^s He never yet failed those who trusted in him. The vilest of mankind have found him able to save them to the uttermost. He is a Rock to those who trust in him; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against them.^t Let all believers then rejoice in their security; and hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering.”]

3. How careful should we be, what superstructure we raise upon him!

[While Christ is the foundation of our hope, we are also to build upon him all our works. But our works will all be tried by fire. If they be not such as tend to his glory, they will be burnt up as hay, and wood, and stubble. If they be truly good, they will stand the trial, like gold, or silver, or precious stones.^x Let us then give diligent heed to our works. We may suffer loss *in heaven*, though we should not suffer the loss *of heaven.*^y Let us then seek “*a full reward.*”^z While we renounce good works *in point of dependence*, let us practise them *from love to our Redeemer*. Thus shall we put to silence our adversaries; and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.]

^r Isaiah Ixiv. 6. Phil. iii. 9. ^s Isaiah xxviii. 16. ^t Matt. xvi. 18.
^u Heb. x. 23. ^x Ver. 11—14. ^y Ver. 15. ^z 2 John 8.

CCCLXXXVII. THE GUILT AND DANGER OF NOT LOVING CHRIST.

1 Cor. xvi. 22. *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha.*

EVERY religion has some characteristic mark whereby it may be distinguished from all others—The leading

feature of Christianity is, that it requires a resolute adherence and an inviolable attachment to Jesus Christ—Though it includes both morality and a regard to God, it does not stop there; but leads us to Jesus Christ as the only mediator through whom divine blessings can flow down to us, or our services go up with acceptance before God—Whatever difference may exist between Christians with respect to other points, all are agreed in love to Christ—St. Paul did not hesitate to denounce the severest curse against all who should be wanting in this most essential point—He had finished this Epistle by the hand of an amanuensis, and was going, as his manner was in every Epistle, to write his benediction with his own hand; but deeply solicitous for the welfare of the church, as well as for the glory of his divine Master, he inserted between his salutation and his benediction these ever memorable words;—“ If any man,” &c.—These are in the form of a judicial sentence, which we shall

I. Explain

The solemnity with which this sentence is delivered surely bespeaks our most candid attention—But how shall we, in drawing the line between nominal and real Christians, speak with such precision, as neither to discourage the weak, nor to confirm hypocrites or formalists in their delusions?—Let us explain

1. What it is to love the Lord Jesus Christ

[Love, whatever be its object, implies such an esteem of that object, such a desire after it, and such a delight in it, as the object itself deserves—What would be an idolatrous fondness when placed on one object, would fall very far short of the affection that might be justly claimed by another—Now Christ being incomparably more worthy of our love than any created being, our love to him ought to be unrivalled and supreme—To compliment him with honourable titles, while we feel no real regard for him in our souls, is no better than an impious mockery—We must entertain high and exalted thoughts of him as the Saviour of the world; and have learned with Paul to “ count all things but dross and dung in comparison of him”———We must also feel such need of him in his mediatorial office and character, as to say with David, “ My soul longeth for thee even as the hart panteth for the water-brooks;” “ Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there

is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"— —— Our fellowship with him, moreover, must be sweet: nor must we find less pleasure in doing his will than in enjoying his presence—— This is the criterion whereby he himself has taught us to judge of our love to him.^{a]}

2. What is the judgment denounced against those who are destitute of this love?

[“Anathema” is a term often used to signify only an ecclesiastical censure, or an excommunication from the church; but the addition of the word “Maran-atha” necessitates us to understand it in reference to the judgment at the last day— Under the Jewish law there were many crimes that were to be punished with death; and, when a person was convicted of one of these, he was executed according to the divine command: but when the Jews were brought into subjection to the Romans, they lost the power of life and death:^b when therefore a person committed any crime, that would have been punished with death by the Jewish law, the Jews excommunicated the offender, and expected that God would visit him in some signal manner; or at least inflict an adequate punishment upon him at the last day—In reference to this, it should seem, the apostle used the word “Maran-atha,” which in the Syriac language means, “The Lord cometh”—The import therefore of the denunciation in the text is, That, as they, who did not love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, deserved to be blotted out of the list of true Christians, and to be punished with everlasting destruction, so there was no doubt but that, although man could not take cognizance of that offence, God would; and execute signal vengeance on all those who should live and die under the guilt of it—]

Severe as this sentence is, it is such as we may undertake to

II. Vindicate

It may not be improper first to vindicate *the apostle himself*

[To consign to everlasting destruction those who are free from any gross sin, and who perhaps abound in “the form of religion, while they are only destitute of its power,” may seem harsh—But we shall in vain attempt to put any milder interpretation on the words of the text—Shall we then censure the apostle as uncharitable, and severe? If we do, we must involve all the other inspired writers and Christ himself in the same censure—Moses, by God’s command, denounced similar vengeance on persons of various descriptions, and required

^a John xiv. 21, and xv. 14.

^b John xviii. 31.

the people to confirm his word by an express declaration of their own consent and approbation^c—Jeremiah and Malachi repeatedly spake to the same effect^d—Nor was this peculiar to those who lived under the legal dispensation: St. Paul repeatedly denounced a curse even against any angel from heaven that should presume to publish any other gospel than that which he had preached^e—Yea, the meek and compassionate Jesus declared, that God would be a Father to none who did not love him;^f and that he himself would in the last day summon before him all that had refused his yoke, and order them to be slain without mercy^g—Such examples as these may well screen the apostle from any imputation of needless severity—]

Next we will vindicate *the sentence he denounced*

Awful as it is, it will appear both just and reasonable, if we only consider the exceeding sinfulness of not loving the Lord Jesus—This sin implies

1. Rebellion against the highest authority

[God has by an audible voice from heaven commanded us to “hear” his Son, that is, to regard him with attention, love and obedience—He has enjoined all the great and noble of the earth to “kiss the son” in token of their affection and homage^h—He has required all men to honour the Son even as they honour the Fatherⁱ—And are we at liberty to set at nought this authority?—Do we feel indignant, if our child or our servant refuse obedience to our just commands, and shall not the most high God express his indignation against us for resisting and despising the most reasonable command that could possibly be given us?—If man forbear to notice this iniquity, shall God also? shall he give us reason for that atheistical reflection, “Thou God wilt not regard it?”—]

2. A contempt of the highest excellency

[In the Lord Jesus Christ is every possible excellency combined—Whether we view him in his divine, his human, or his mediatorial character, he is “altogether lovely”—There is nothing wanting in him which can in any way conduce to the glory of God or the good of men—What shall we say then of those who love not such a glorious being? Surely they pour contempt upon him—This is the construction which God himself puts upon their conduct; “Him that honoureth

^c Deut. xxvii. 15—26, twelve times.

^d Jer. xi. 3. and xvii. 5. and xlviij. 10. Mal. i. 14.

^e Gal. i. 8, 9. ^f John viii. 42. ^g Luke xix. 27.

^h Ps. ii. 12. ⁱ John v. 23.

me, I will honour; but he that *despiseth* me shall be lightly esteemed"^k—And is not this a sin of the deepest die? to despise him who is the fountain of all excellency! to despise him whom all the angels adore! What must not such iniquity as this deserve?—Surely to be despised and abhorred of him is the least that such offenders can expect—]

3. Ingratitude towards the greatest Benefactor

[Can we reflect a moment on what Christ has done and suffered for us, and not stand amazed that there should be a creature upon earth that does not love him?—Can we contemplate his mysterious incarnation, his laborious life, his painful death, his continual intercession, and all the other wonders of his love, and feel no emotions of gratitude towards him?—Or shall ingratitude to earthly benefactors be deemed the greatest possible aggravation of a fault, and shall such horrid ingratitude of ours be thought light and venial?—No; it stamps an inexpressible baseness on our character; nor can any punishment short of that denounced in the text, be adequate to such impiety—]

APPLICATION

[Let us seriously examine into the evidences of our love to Christ; that if he should ask us, as he did Peter, “Lovest thou me?” we may be able to reply with him, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee”—Let us tremble at the thought of subjecting ourselves to the judgments here denounced—And instead of presuming to speak against them as too severe, let us make it our constant endeavour to escape them—So shall death and judgment be divested of all their terrors; and Christ, whom we love, be the eternal portion of our souls—]

^k 1 Sam. ii. 30.

CCCLXXXVIII. HATRED OF CHRIST IS HATRED OF THE FATHER.

John xv. 23. *He that hateth me, hateth my Father also.*

MEN are ever disposed to palliate their sins, and, by representing them under some specious name, to conceal their real enormity—But God calls every sin by its proper name, and speaks of it with just abhorrence—Co-

veteousness in his eyes is not prudence, but idolatry:^a a disregard of his presence is not mere inadvertence, but a denial of his most essential attributes:^b and a contempt of his gospel is not a venial ignorance or inattention, but an absolute hatred both of Christ and of the Father—To confirm this truth we will endeavour to shew

I. Who they are that hate Christ

It may be thought that none but Jews can be guilty of hating Christ, and that the bearing of his name is a sufficient testimony of our regard for him—But there are too many who, notwithstanding they have been baptized into his name, are yet “enemies to him in their minds”—Certainly we must number among his enemies

1. Those who disregard his gospel

[The gospel of Christ ought to be universally received as “glad tidings of great joy”—But the greater part of mankind feel an aversion to it—Some dislike its fundamental doctrine of salvation by faith, and represent it as injurious to the interests of morality—Others hate the duties it enjoins, and traduce it as requiring a state of mind totally incompatible with the discharge of our offices in social and civil life—Many even of those who approve of the gospel in their judgment, are yet very far from experiencing its power in their souls—They enjoy not its promises, they fulfil not its precepts, they know not its renovating, sanctifying effects—It may be asked, Are all these persons haters of Christ? Let Christ himself answer that question—He states, that a practical renunciation of his authority is a proof, that they are enemies to him in their hearts, and will cause them to be treated as his enemies in the day that he shall judge the world^c]—

2. Those who neglect his ordinances

[Our Lord has promised his peculiar presence to us while we seek him in the ordinances of his own appointment—Should not then the hope of enjoying his presence endear the ordinances to us, and make us regard them as our most inestimable privilege?—But how are they regarded by the generality amongst us?—Does not worldly business or pleasure often detain us needlessly from the house of God? And when we are assembled for worship, do not our thoughts rove to the very ends of the earth, so that, though we “draw nigh to God with our lips, our hearts are far from him?”—Are not almost all persons cold and remiss in secret prayer?—And is

^a Eph. v. 5.

^b Ps. x. 11, 13.

^c Luke xix. 14, 27.

not family religion either banished altogether, or conducted with such formality as to render it irksome and unprofitable? —Our Lord left it as his dying command that we should often partake of bread and wine in remembrance of his body broken and his blood shed for us—Yet is not his table either shamefully deserted, or else profaned by impenitent, unsanctified communicants?—And what construction must we put on such conduct? Our Lord plainly tells us, that he considers them as his enemies, and that none of those who thus despise his invitations, shall ever taste of his supper^d]—]

3. Those who persecute his people

[Persecution is not carried now to the same extent that it has been in former ages—But has it ceased?—Experience proves that there is the same enmity in the hearts of men against the faithful servants of God as ever there was—There are many at this day who are true descendants of Cain and Ishmael—And, as long as there shall be an unconverted man upon earth, it will be found, that they, who are born after the flesh, will persecute those who are born after the Spirit—If they do not kill the saints, they will “revile them, and separate them from their company, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ’s sake”—And are not such persons enemies to Christ? Yes; he considers himself as the real butt of their malice—Saul thought he was justly punishing some wild fanatics when he dragged the Christians to prison and to death; but Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?^e—And the prophet tells us that whosoever toucheth the Lord’s people, toucheth the apple of his eye—]

The extreme enormity of their conduct appears in this,

II. That the hatred of Christ is, in fact, a hatred of the Father also

Christ is essentially “one with the Father;” and as “whosoever had seen Christ, had seen the Father,” so, “whosoever hateth Christ must of necessity hate the Father also”—But it is evident in other points of view that they hate the Father; for they hate

1. His authority

[God commands all men to believe in his Son, to “kiss him” with holy reverence, and to honour him even as they honour the Father^g—But the unequivocal language of those who comply not with his command is, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” “Who is the Lord that we

^d Luke xiv. 18, 24.

^e Gal. iv. 29.

^f Acts ix. 4.

^g Zech. ii. 8.

^h Ps. ii. 12. John v. 23.

should obey him? we know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice"—Whatever they may pretend, they are not deceived through unavoidable ignorance, or impelled by irresistible force to reject Christ; they do it from a rooted aversion to the Father himself, and evince by their conduct the truth of that declaration, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"ⁱ]—

2. His image

[The word, the ordinances, and the people of God, all bear upon them the impression of God's holiness—And this is the very ground of that aversion which rises against them in the hearts of the ungodly—The gospel is disliked as requiring so much purity and self-denial—The worship of God could be easily tolerated, if an outward form would suffice; but the spirituality and devotion necessary to an acceptable performance of this duty, causes the carnal heart to revolt from it as irksome—if the saints too would countenance the world in its sinful practices, the offence of the cross would cease; but they "make their light to shine before men;" and on this account they, whose deeds are evil, hate, revile, and persecute them—Now this clearly proves, that holiness itself is their aversion, and consequently that the image of God, which principally consists in holiness, is hateful to them—Will any say, It is hypocrisy that they hate, and not holiness? Wherefore then were Christ and his apostles so universally the objects of cruel persecution? Was there any guile in him? Was he not "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" and walked not his disciples in his steps? It is certain, not only that the image of God is hated by the enemies of Christ, but that every thing that bears his image is hated by them *on that very account*, and *in proportion* as it exhibits a resemblance of him—]

3. His very existence

[It is vain indeed to entertain the thought that God could be annihilated—But, if we could suppose for a moment that it were declared from heaven, "There is no God;" would not the tidings excite a general satisfaction?—Would not all the haters of Christ congratulate themselves that there was no God to call them to an account, none to punish them for their iniquities?—Would they not look forward to an unrestrained indulgence of their lusts with pleasure, instead of weeping for the loss of their best and dearest friend?—Yes; as the enemies of Christ exulting in his crucifixion, so would all who hate him rejoice, if the Father also were utterly extinct

ⁱ Rom. viii. 8, 7.

—That this is no fanciful idea will appear from the declaration of God himself, “The fool hath said in his heart, No God!”^k] —]

INFER

1. How desperate is the wickedness of the human heart!

[Wherefore is it that men are so full of enmity against Christ and his Father? Is it for having given us his dear Son that they hate the Father; or do they hate Christ for laying down his life for us?—Many good things has he done; for which of them do we reject him?—O let the haters of God blush and be confounded; let them abhor themselves for all their iniquities, and abominations—]

2. What a dreadful place must hell be!

[Here the wickedness of men is restrained by the preventing grace of God—But in hell it will rage without control—How will all the miserable spirits then vent their malice! How will they gnaw their tongues and blaspheme their God?^l—May we never know this by bitter experience—]

3. How astonishing is the tender mercy of our God!

[One would suppose that God should feel nothing but indignation against such an ungrateful world—But behold! he “waitheth to be gracious unto them;” he sends them offers of pardon; he even intreats and “beseeches them to be reconciled to him”^m—O let his goodness lead us to repentance—Let us cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and bow to the sceptre of his grace—So shall we yet be numbered among the friends of God, and be living monuments of his mercy to all eternity—]

^k Ps. xiv. 1.

^l Rev. xvi. 9.

^m 2 Cor. v. 20.

CCCLXXXIX. THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING THE GREAT SACRIFICE.

1 Sam. ii. 25. *If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?*

THE consideration of an earthly tribunal is of great use to restrain the wickedness of ungodly men. But as there are innumerable offences which can neither be proved by human testimony, nor defined by human laws, it is necessary that men should be reminded of another

tribunal, to which they shall be shortly summoned, and before which they shall be called to a strict account. Long before the deluge this was a topic much enforced by the preachers of religion;^a and Eli adverted to it, as well calculated to enforce his exhortations, and to dissuade his sons from their impieties. His sons were transgressors of no common stamp: they are justly reprobated as sons of Belial. Their father being advanced in years, the administration of the priestly office had devolved to them. This office they abused to the purposes of oppression and debauchery. The interposition of their father became highly necessary: as God's vicegerent, he should have vindicated the honour of God, and the rights of his subjects. He should have interposed, not only with parental, but judicial authority. He should not only have manifested his detestation of their lewdness and rapacity, but should have punished them with degradation. He however, either from a timidity and supineness incident to age, or from a shameful partiality for his own children, forbore to inflict the punishment they deserved; and contented himself with expostulations and reproofs. He said to them, "Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil doings by all this people. Nay, my sons: for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?" With less hardened criminals these words might have produced a good effect: for if it be awful to be summoned before an earthly judge, how much more so to be called into the presence of God, laden with iniquities, and destitute of any advocate or intercessor!

May our minds be impressed with reverence and godly fear, while we consider the import of this admonition, and deduce from it some suitable and important observations.

The words of the text do not at first sight appear to need much explanation: but we cannot well understand the antithesis, or see the force of the interrogation, without adverting particularly to the circumstances, which occasioned the reproof. The sense is not, That, if a man

^a Jude 14, 15.

violate an human law, he shall be condemned by an earthly judge; and, that if he violate the divine law, he shall be condemned by God himself: this is far short of its real import.

The sin which the sons of Eli had committed was of a peculiar nature. They, as priests, had a right to certain parts of all the sacrifices that were offered: but instead of being contented with the parts which God had allotted them, and of burning the fat according to the divine appointment, they sent their servants to strike their flesh-hooks of three teeth into the pot or chaldron where the meat was seething, and to take whatsoever the flesh-hook might bring up. If they came before the flesh was put into the chaldron, they demanded it raw, together with all the fat that was upon it. If the people objected to such lawless proceedings, or reminded them that they must not forget to burn the fat, the servants were ordered to take away the meat immediately, and by force.^b To these enormities, the young men added others of a most malignant nature: they, who, from their office, should have been ministers of justice, and patterns of all sanctity, availed themselves of their situation to seduce the women, when they came to worship at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.^c Thus they discouraged the people from even coming to the house of God, and caused them to “abhor the offering of the Lord.”

Now it should be recollected that sacrifices were the instituted means of reconciliation with God: there was no other way in which any offence, whether ceremonial or moral, could be purged, but by the offering of the appointed sacrifice before the door of the tabernacle: without shedding of blood there was to be no remission.^d

It should be remembered further, that these sacrifices were typical of the great sacrifice which Christ was in due time to offer upon the cross. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews was written to establish and illustrate this point. “The blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin:” they had no efficacy at all, but as they typified him who was to “appear in this last dispensation to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”^e

^b Jude 16.

^c Heb. ix. 22.

^d Ver. 22.

^e Heb. ix. 25, 26, and x. 1, 4, 14.

In causing therefore the offerings of the Lord to be thus abhorred, the young men sinned in a peculiar manner against God himself: they poured contempt upon the very means which God had provided for their obtaining of pardon and reconciliation with him. Thus they rendered their situation desperate: had they only committed some heinous offence against man, a judge, entrusted with the execution of the laws, might have arbitrated between the parties: he might have punished the delinquents, and obtained satisfaction for the injured person: and, the offenders, if truly penitent, might have brought their offering to God, and thus, through the blood of their sacrifice and the intercession of the priest, have obtained the remission of their sin. But they had sinned immediately against God himself; so that there was no third person to redress the grievance or settle the dispute. Moreover they had despised the only atonement that could be offered for them: yea, in despising the typical, they had, in fact, disclaimed all trust in the real atonement. What hope then remained for them? Having provoked God, they had no person of authority sufficient to arbitrate between them: and having rejected the only sacrifice, the only advocate, the great High Priest, they had none to make atonement for them, they had none to intercede: they must therefore be left to their fate, and reap the bitter fruits of their iniquities. In confirmation of this God declared, that “their sin should not be purged by sacrifice or offering for ever.”^f

With this explanation we see at once the force and emphasis of the words before us. They were intended to express the exceeding heinousness of the sins that had been committed, and to deter the offenders from persisting in such fatal conduct. While they intimate the danger to which a violation of human laws will expose us, they insinuate the infinitely greater danger we incur by contemning the only means of forgiveness with God.

With the additional light which the New Testament reflects on this passage, we may see that *we* are as much interested in this admonition, as the very persons were, to

whom it was first given: for, though we have not run to their excess of riot, or caused the offering of the Lord to be so abhorred, yet we have too much disregarded the sacrifice of the Son of God. If we have not openly opposed the atonement of Christ, we have been, perhaps still are, too indifferent about it. The censure therefore in the text, how severe soever it may appear, lies in full force against us. To neglect the Saviour, is, in a most fatal manner, to sin against God: it is, at the same time, to provoke the Majesty of heaven, and to reject the only advocate, the only propitiation for sin. Hence the apostle asks with such tremendous energy, “How shall ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation?”^g Which question, both in import and expression, accords with that in our text, “If a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?”

In this application of the passage we are countenanced by a parallel passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews,^h “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” Here the writer states the reason, why an apostate from the truth has nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation; the reason is the same as in our text; he has turned his back on the sacrifice of Christ, and there will be no other sacrifice for sin to all eternity: there is therefore no hope of salvation for him. The Apostle then adds, “He that despised Moses’ law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace?” Thus may we ask, in reference to the text, If the infraction of human laws, when substantiated by sufficient evidence, be ever punished with the loss of life, how much more shall a neglect and contempt of Christ meet with due recompence from an holy and omniscient God?

^g Heb. ii. 3.

^h Heb. x. 26—29.

The text being thus explained, we may proceed to deduce from it some important observations.

The solemnity of the present occasion requires us to take some notice of human judicatures: we shall not however restrict our observations to them: there is a future judgment to which we must look forward; nor should we satisfy your expectations any more than our own conscience, if we did not principally advert to that. The text affords us a proper opportunity for discharging our duty in both respects.

First then we observe, That *the dispensing of justice by persons duly qualified and authorized, is an unspeakable blessing to a nation.*

The institution of judges is a necessary part of every well ordered government. When God called his people Israel, and formed them into a distinct nation by his servant Moses, he gave this command; “ Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates which the Lord thy God giveth thee throughout all thy tribes; and they shall judge the people with just judgment.”ⁱ When Jehoshaphat set himself to restore the political and religious welfare of his kingdom, he paid immediate attention to this point: “ he set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city; and said to the judges, Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment.”^k After the Babylonish captivity also, when the Persian monarch gave commandment respecting the *re-establishment* of the Jews in their own land, he particularly enjoined Ezra to be mindful of this matter: “ Thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river: and whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.”^j Indeed, without such an institution, the laws themselves would be altogether vain and useless: the weak would sink under oppression; and the strong tyrannize with im-

ⁱ Deut. xvi. 18.

^k 2 Chron. vii. 25, 26.

^j Ezra vii. 25, 26.

punity. The bonds of society would be broken asunder; and universal anarchy would prevail. We have witnessed the destruction of all constituted authorities, and the utter annihilation of all established laws. We have beheld licentiousness stalking with the cap of liberty, and ferocious despotism, under the name of equality, spreading desolation with an undiscriminating hand. But, blessed be God, it is not thus with Britain: I pray God it never may be. The laws, with us, are respected; and they, who superintend the execution of them, are revered. If one man sin against another, we have judges, who are competent, and not afraid, to judge him. If existing laws are not sufficient to check the progress of conspiracy and treason, we have a legislature, that will deliberate with coolness, and enact with wisdom. If the necessary restraints be violated by presumptuous demagogues, we have magistrates, that will call the offenders to trial: juries that will bring in their verdict with conscientious truth; and judges, that, while they declare the sentence of the law with firmness, know how to temper judgment with mercy. Yes, to their united efforts, under the care of Providence, we owe it, that faction and sedition have been disarmed of the power, would to God I might also add, the inclination, to disturb the realm.

However the opinions of many were shaken for a time by specious arguments and groundless cavils, there are but few, it is hoped, at this time, whose eyes have not been opened to discern the excellence of our constitution. Who, that has seen insulted majesty proclaiming pardon to mutiny and sedition; who that, when the contemners of that pardon were brought to trial, has seen the very judges becoming counsel for the accused; who, that has seen to what an amazing extent lenity has been carried (not from partiality or supineness, as under Eli's administration, but from a love of mercy, and a desire to win the offenders to a sense of duty) who, that reflects how forbearance has been exercised, insomuch that not a single execution even of the most daring traitors took place, till lenient measures absolutely defeated their own ends; who, I say, that has seen these things, must not acknowledge the equity and mildness of our government? And who, that knows the value of such a government, would not uphold it to the utmost of his power?

While we are speaking upon this subject, it is impossible to omit the mention of one, who with unexampled fortitude has stemmed the torrent of iniquity in this country, and has made the most opulent to know, that if they will tempt the chastity of individuals, and destroy the peace of families, they shall do it at their peril. I do not hesitate to say, that every father of a family, and every lover of virtue in this kingdom, stands indebted to him, and has reason to bless God, that such integrity and power are combined in one person.^m

There is one other point worthy to be noticed in the judicatories of this country, I mean, a freedom from political or religious prejudice. If a man be known to disapprove the measures of government, he is not the less likely on that account to obtain justice in any cause in which he may be engaged: If he dissent from the established mode of worship, he is not the less protected in the right of serving God according to his conscience: nor, if on account of superior zeal and piety, he be branded with an ignominious name, will prejudice be suffered to bias the decisions of our courts against him. Every member of the community, of whatever denomination or description, is sure to have his cause attentively heard, and impartially determined.

These things cannot but create a love to our constitution in the mind of every man, who rightly appreciates the blessings of civil and religious liberty. And I pray God that the laws of our country may ever continue to be thus respected, and to be thus dispensed.

The observation now made, has been suggested by the first part of Eli's admonition. Another observation we may offer, arising from the obvious connexion which subsists between that and the latter member of the text; namely, *That there are many things, not cognizable by human laws, which will be brought to trial before the judge of quick and dead.* Man's tribunal is erected principally for judging things which particularly affect the welfare of society; and, in criminal causes, respect is had to actions

^m The name of LORD KENYON will necessarily occur to the mind of every reader.

rather than to thoughts, or at least to actions as the evidences of our thoughts. But at the tribunal of God, every thing which affected the divine government will be brought forward, the sins against God, as well as sins against our fellow-creatures; the sins of omission, as well as of commission; the sins of thought and desire, as well as those of purpose and of act. There is not any one action of our lives that will not then be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary: there is not a word of our lips, which will not then bear its proper stamp of piety, or transgression: there is not so much as a thought of our hearts, that will not receive its just mark of approbation or displeasure. We are expressly told, that "God in that day will judge the secrets of men; that he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart;" and that "he will then reward every man according to what he hath done; whether it be good or evil;" "to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing have sought for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life: but to them that were contentious, and obeyed not the truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, even upon every soul of man that doeth evil." At that day, we are informed, "The Judge will come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;" and he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, even "with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God." "Then shall the sea give up the dead which were in it, and death and hell deliver up the dead that were in them, and all, small and great, shall stand before God." "The antient of days, whose garment is white as snow, and the hair of whose head is like pure wool, will sit upon his fiery throne; and while a fiery stream issues from before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him, he will open the books;" the book of life,^o wherein the names of his people are written; the book of his remembrance,^p wherein the most secret imaginations of men's hearts were registered; the book of conscience too,^q which, however illegible now through our ignorance and

ⁿ Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^p Mal. iii. 16.

^o Rev. xx. 12.

^q Matt. xxii. 12.

partiality, will be found to correspond with his records in every particular; and lastly, the book of his law,^r according to which he will pass his judgment. Ah! who can reflect on the solemnities of that day, and not be filled with awe? Who amongst us can endure so strict a scrutiny? "Who can abide the day of his coming?" We may easily conceive the feelings of a prisoner, who, being to be tried for a capital offence, hears the trumpet announce the coming of his judge. Let us endeavour to realize the thought, and to apply it to our own case. We are sure that such a criminal would lose no time in preparing for his defence. He would engage his counsel, summon his witnesses, and employ every art in order to obtain a favourable sentence. Let us go and do likewise: our "time is short; the Judge is at the door," and if we be unprepared to meet him, woe be unto us; our sentence will be awful indeed: the very terms, in which it will be expressed, are already told us; "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."^s In one respect indeed we differ widely from such a criminal: if he escape, it must be through want of evidence to convict him: whereas the only way for us to escape is, to confess our guilt, and plead the atonement offered for us by the Son of God.

This leads me to my last observation, namely, THAT A NEGLECT OF CHRIST WILL BE FOUND IN THAT DAY TO HAVE BEEN THE MOST FATAL OF ALL OFFENCES. Sins of any other kind, how heinous soever they may have been, yea, though they may have brought us to an ignominious end, may yet be pardoned of our God, provided we turn to him with unfeigned sorrow and contrition, and rely on the atonement which Christ has offered. The scriptures are extremely full and strong upon this subject. They declare that "all who believe, shall be justified from all things;" that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin;" that "though our sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson they shall be white as snow." So undoubted is this truth, and so suited to the condition of fallen man,

that it has been often and well proclaimed in our very courts of justice, proclaimed, I say, to criminals condemned, at the very time of condemnation, and that too, by those very persons who pronounced the sentence of death against them. Yes, thanks be to God, there are judges, even in this degenerate age, who are not ashamed to unite the balm of Christian counsel with the severity of a penal sentence.

But let us suppose that we have neither violated the laws of man, nor, in any flagrant instances, the laws of God; shall we therefore be acquitted at God's Tribunal? Shall we need none to intreat for us, none to plead our cause in that day? May we safely neglect the sacrifice of Christ, because we have abstained from gross iniquities? Let us not deceive ourselves with any such dangerous imagination: "We all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" "every mouth therefore must be stopped, and all the world must become guilty before God." None can stand upon the footing of his own righteousness. Having transgressed the law, we are cursed by the law; as it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. We must therefore all, without exception, seek deliverance in him, "who hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." God has declared that "there is salvation in no other; that there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ;" if we will not "enter by that door," we exclude ourselves from even a possibility of obtaining mercy to all eternity.

I know it will be urged in opposition to this, that, we have been free from all gross offences, and have been punctual in the observance of many civil and religious duties. Be it so: but how would such a plea sound in a court of justice? Let a criminal, accused of rebellion against an earthly monarch, plead his allegiance to the King of kings; let him say, "I regarded his sacrifice, I trusted in the atonement, I sought an interest in Christ." Would his plea be valid? Would he not be told immediately, that these things he ought indeed to have done, and not to have left the other undone? Thus then we

answer those who go about to establish their own righteousness instead of submitting to the righteousness of God; "It was well that you abstained from gross sin, and fulfilled many duties; but you ought also to have sought redemption through the blood of Christ; you ought to have "fled for refuge to the hope set before you: and because you have neglected him, you have no part or lot in his salvation." What can be plainer than our Lord's own assertions, "No man cometh to the Father but by me;" and, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me?" or what can be more awful than that interrogation of St. Peter, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" We may venture to put the question to the conscience of every considerate man; If you sin against God in neglecting and despising his dear Son, what atonement will you offer to him? If you make light of the sacrifice offered upon Calvary, where will you find another sacrifice for sin? If you disregard the mediation and intercession of Christ, where will you find another advocate? If you sin thus against God, who shall intreat for you?

Here then the subject wears a very serious and solemn aspect. We all are hastening to "the judgment-seat of Christ, where we must give account of ourselves to God." There, high and low, rich and poor, judges and criminals, must all appear to receive their sentence of condemnation or acquittal; there will be no respect of persons with God: even the criminal who died by the hand of the executioner, provided that his disgraceful circumstances led him to reflection, and made him implore mercy through the blood of Jesus, shall stand a monument of redeeming grace: while his superiors in morality, yea, even the judge who condemned him, if they died in impenitence and unbelief, shall hear the sentence of condemnation pronounced against them, and be doomed to that "second death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

Let us then enquire diligently into the state of our souls: let us "judge ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord." Let us examine what regard we have paid, and are yet daily paying, to the sacrifice of Christ? let us enquire whether "he be all our salvation and all our

desire?" And let us remember, that if we would have him to intreat for us in that day, we must now intreat him for ourselves, "desiring earnestly to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God which is by him."

CCCXC. THE NECESSITY OF HAVING THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.

Rom. viii. 9. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

MAN at his first creation was made in the divine image; God communed with him as a friend, and dwelt in him as a temple: but this harmony was not of long continuance: man sinned; and God in righteous judgment departed from him—Not willing however that his apostate creatures should irrecoverably perish, God sent his Son to make atonement for their sins; and his Spirit to renew their natures, that so they might be restored to his favour, and rendered meet for the inheritance they had forfeited—It is of this Spirit that the apostle speaks in the text, and declares that we must have him dwelling in us if we would belong to Christ—We might understand the Spirit as referring to the *disposition* of Christ; but that the context evidently confines its import to that blessed Spirit, who "raised up Christ from the dead, and will in due time raise up us also"—He is called "the Spirit of God," and "the Spirit of Christ," because Christ is God, and the Spirit acts as his deputy—We propose to shew

I. That we *may* have the Spirit

By "having the Spirit" we do not mean, that we are to have those *common* operations of the Spirit, which the most ungodly men both experience and resist;^a (for then the Apostle's assertion would be frivolous in the extreme) nor do we mean those *miraculous* powers, which were

^a Gen. vi. 3. Isaiah lxiii. 10.

given in the apostolic age; (for many, who were Christ's, never received those powers; and many exercised those powers who never belonged to Christ^b) but we mean those *special* influences of the Spirit, whereby men are enlightened, and transformed into the divine image—In this sense we affirm that we *may* have the Spirit of Christ

[*In the first ages of Christianity, not a few individuals only, but whole churches received the influences of which we speak—* St. Paul prayed that the whole church at Ephesus might have “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ,” and that they might be “renewed by the Spirit in their inward man:”^c and, speaking of the Christian church at large, he especially ascribes their attainments to the operations of the Holy Ghost; “Not by works of righteousness which we have done,” says he, “but according to his mercy God hath saved us, by the washing of regeneration and *renewing of the Holy Ghost*”^d—Now if the whole Christian church received the Spirit of Christ formerly, why should not *we* at this day? Is our strength so much greater than theirs, or the work of sanctification so much easier, that we do not need the same divine assistance? or, when the apostle said, “The promise of the Spirit is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call,”^e did he mean to limit the gift of the Spirit to the apostolic age?—But *why do the scriptures speak so much respecting our having the Spirit?* They teach us to pray for it;^f they promise it to us;^g they require us to make use of it and depend upon it in all holy exercises, “to live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit:”^h would all this be spoken if we were not to expect the holy Spirit?—*Why, in the liturgy of our church, do we so often pray for “the inspiration of the holy Spirit that we may think those things that be good, and for his merciful guidance that we may perform the same?”*ⁱ—Did those holy men who compiled our liturgy think that we had no just reason to expect the influences of God’s Spirit?—Is it enthusiasm for us to expect what all the first Christians had, what the scriptures require us to have, and what we ourselves continually pray for?—If we use these prayers with sincerity, the world will call us enthusiasts; but we had better be accounted enthusiasts by man, than hypocrites by God—

^b Matt. vii. 22, 23. ^c Eph. i. 17. and iii. 16. ^d Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^e Acts ii. 38, 39. ^f Luke xi. 13.

^g John vii. 37—39. ^h Gal. v. 25. Jude 20.

ⁱ See the Collect for the fifth Sunday after Easter; and for Whit-sunday; and the first in the Communion service.

We should need to apologize for arguing so plain a point, if the daring infidelity of the age did not render it, alas! too necessary—]

We must carry our assertion still further, and say

II. That we *must* have the Spirit

The aid of God's Spirit is necessary in order to our being Christ's: without it

We cannot know Christ

[By nature, we are altogether blind to spiritual things—We are assured on most unquestionable authority that “the natural man accounts the things of the Spirit to be foolishness, and that he not only does not receive, but *cannot know* them, because they are, spiritually discerned”^k—And, with respect to the knowledge of Christ in particular, our Lord tells us that, as no man knoweth the Father but the Son, so no man knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom God shall be pleased to reveal him!—The Spirit of God must “take of the things that are Christ's and shew them unto us;” he must “open our understandings to understand them;” and unless he “guide us into all truth” we shall wander in the mazes of ignorance and error to the latest period of our lives, and “perish at last through lack of knowledge”—]

We cannot resemble Christ

[We have altogether lost the image of God; nor can we ever recover it by any power of our own—That image consists in righteousness and true holiness, not the smallest part of which we can obtain without the Spirit—If we would not go on fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, we must walk in the Spirit:^m if we would mortify the deeds of the body, it must be through the Spirit:ⁿ if we would have our trials sanctified, it must be through a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ:^o if we would “wait for the hope of righteousness by faith, it must be through the Spirit”^p—There is not any single grace which can be produced by any other means; they are all fruits of the Spirit:^q and as long as any man continues destitute of the Spirit, he must of necessity continue earthly and sensual^r—He, and he alone, can give us either to will or to do any good thing^s—Now is holiness necessary in order that we may resemble Christ; and is every part of holiness, both root and

^k 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^l Matt. xi. 27.

^m Gal. v. 16.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 13.

^o Phil. i. 19.

^p Gal. v. 5.

^q Gal. v. 22, 23.

^r Jude 19.

^s Phil. ii. 13.

branch, the produce of God's Spirit; and can any one doubt whether it be necessary for us to have the Spirit?—]

We cannot enjoy Christ

[We have not naturally any taste for spiritual enjoyments; we affect the things of time and sense, and those only—Indeed, how is it possible that we should enjoy him whom we do not know? Or how can his love be shed abroad in our hearts but by the Spirit?^t—If any one think he can enjoy Christ by any power of his own, let him only make the experiment; let him retire to his closet for one hour, and say, “I will spend this hour in the enjoyment of Christ; I will delight myself in him with my whole heart;” let him make the attempt, and he shall soon be undeceived by the most convincing of all arguments, his own experience; nor are we afraid to rest the whole argument upon the issue of such a trial—Nor can we enjoy Christ hereafter any more than we can in this world, if we be not prepared for it by the Spirit of God—There is a “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light” which we must have, before we could find comfort in the presence of our Lord—What pleasure could we take in him whom we do not at all resemble? “What communion could light have with darkness, or Christ with Belial?”^u—We find that even now, when our corruptions are so restrained, one single hour is irksome, if spent in spiritual exercises; and we may be sure we cannot bear to be occupied without intermission to all eternity in those duties, for which we have no inclination, yea, from which we are most exceedingly averse—

But let one asseveration of the true and faithful witness stand in lieu of ten thousand arguments; Ye MUST be born again, says our Lord; and that, not of water only, but of the Spirit; or else ye can never enter into the kingdom of God^x]—

We shall endeavour to IMPROVE this subject

1. By a general enquiry

[Have we the Spirit; or are we yet destitute of his gracious influences?—Some think this a needless enquiry, and one which cannot be satisfactorily resolved—But can we be “brought out of darkness into marvellous light,” and be “turned from the power of Satan unto God,” without knowing that we have experienced some change?—St. Paul supposes such ignorance to be inconsistent with saving conversion to God: he asks, “Know ye not that your bodies are the tem-

^t Rom. v. 5.

^u 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

^x John iii. 5—7.

ple of the Holy Ghost?"^y and again, "Know ye not how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"^z Now here he not only declares that we are reprobates if we have not the Spirit of God, but considers this truth as known and acknowledged by all true Christians—Enquire then, Whether you have been enlightened, renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and whether you are yet daily experiencing his powerful operations?—Let not this matter hang in suspense, lest you be found reprobates and sons of perdition, when you are fancying yourselves saints, and heirs of glory—]

2. By a particular address

[*Let those, whose consciences testify that they have not the Spirit,* stand convicted and condemned—The text speaks of all such without exception; "if any man," &c. Let it be remembered that, however cultivated our minds may be with human literature, and however amiable our natural dispositions, we must have the Spirit of Christ, or we can be none of his—And what a dreadful state is this? for if we be not Christ's, whose are we? It must be said to us, as our Lord said to the Jews, "Ye are of your Father, the devil"—And are any of us willing to be disclaimed by Jesus in the day of judgment? Would we that he should *then* say to us, "Ye are none of mine?"—If not, let us now seek his good Spirit, and live henceforth under his influence and direction—

But let *those, who have reason to believe that they have the Spirit,* rejoice—They are Christ's: they are his friends; they are the very members of his body; they are "his portion, the lot of his inheritance"—O happy, happy souls, how highly privileged even now! and how unspeakably blessed in the future world!—Be not afraid then of the scoffs of an ungodly world; let them curse, if God do but bless—Improve your present privileges: be careful lest by any means ye "grieve the holy Spirit whereby ye are sealed:" look to him more and more to comfort and transform your souls; and expect with patience that blessed period, when Christ shall acknowledge you before the assembled universe, and number you among his jewels in the day that he shall count them up^a]—

^y 1 Cor. vi. 19.

^z 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^a Mal. iii. 17.

CCCXCI. THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

Matt. xiii. 31. *I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

THE sins of men have, in all ages of the world, been the means and occasions of displaying the divine goodness. It is through the fall of the first Adam, and the crucifixion of Christ, the second Adam, that we attain the knowledge of God's mercy, and see how the exercise of it can consist with the rights of justice. The wickedness of the Pharisees, to whom the words of our text were addressed, was exceeding heinous: yet was it an occasion of manifesting the most unbounded compassion of our Lord. He had cast out a devil, and thereby not only conveyed a rich blessing to the person whom he had healed, but had given an irrefragable proof of his own divine mission. But the Pharisees, blinded by prejudice, imputed his miracle to a confederacy with the devil. Our Lord, instead of giving them up, as he might have justly done, to judicial blindness and impenitence, condescended meekly to reason with them on the subject, and then affectionately cautioned them against indulging so base a spirit; assuring them, that all which they had said and done against him might be forgiven; but that if they should persist in this conduct towards the *Holy Spirit* also, and reject his testimony, they would cut themselves off from all possibility of obtaining mercy.

Our Lord's address to them leads us to consider the extent of God's mercy; and shews us

I. To what it will not extend

It is of great importance to ascertain what is meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

[Many have thought that the sin against the Holy Ghost consisted in ascribing the miracles of Jesus to the agency of Satan. But this opinion is founded on a misconstruction of a passage in St. Mark's Gospel.^a The Evangelist's observation, "Because they said, he hath an unclean spirit," was not intended to shew what the sin against the Holy Ghost was,

^a Mark iii. 22

but to specify what the occasion was, which called forth so awful an admonition. In that very place, the inspired writer contrasts the blasphemy against the Son of man, *which the Pharisees now uttered*, with the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, *which they were in danger of uttering*, when the Holy Ghost should be sent down from heaven:^b and he observes that the former might be forgiven; but that the latter could not.

The sin against the Holy Ghost was the acting towards the Holy Spirit, as they now did towards Christ: it was, the resisting of all the evidences of Christianity, so as deliberately to pour contempt upon the truths revealed by the Holy Spirit; and, the ascribing of *his* miraculous powers, and gracious influences, to the agency of Satan.^c

Why this sin in particular is excepted from the general offers of pardon, it is also of great importance to understand.

[It is plainly declared to be unpardonable. But is not the mercy of God sufficiently extensive to cover this? Yes doubtless; for it is infinite, as all his perfections are. Is there not then a sufficiency in the blood of Christ to atone for this? Yes; his death is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Must we then refer it to the sovereign decree of heaven; and say, that God, in righteous judgment, has excepted this from the general proclamation of forgiveness? Perhaps this may be *one* reason: for St. John mentions “a sin unto death,” for the forgiveness of which it is in vain to intercede.^d But the more substantial reason is, that the sin itself, *in the very nature of things*, excludes a person from all hope of mercy. God has provided salvation for us through the blood of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit; and has told us that there

^b Mark iii. 29. He does not say “hath blasphemed,” but “*shall blaspheme*.”

^c This cannot be made more plain, than by the following paraphrase of a very learned commentator, “ You have represented me as a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and as one who casts out devils by Belzebub; and you will still go on, after all the miracles which I have done among you, to represent me as a false prophet, and a deceiver of the people: nevertheless all these grievous sins shall be forgiven you, if that last dispensation of the Holy Ghost which I shall after my ascension send among you, shall prevail with you to believe in me: but if, when I have sent the Holy Ghost to testify the truth of my mission, and of my resurrection, you shall continue in your unbelief, and shall blaspheme the Holy Ghost, and represent *him* also as an evil spirit, your sin shall never be forgiven, nor shall any thing further be done to call you to repentance.” See Whitby’s Dissertation on the subject.

^d 1 John v. 16.

neither is, nor ever will be, any other way of salvation for sinful man. Now if we despise this salvation, and account it only a devilish delusion, what can be done? We must die, because we reject the only means of life. As a man who has taken a poisonous draught, may live, provided he apply a proper remedy, so may a man who has committed the most deadly sins be saved, if he embrace the gospel: but if he will not use the remedy provided, he must abide the consequences, and perish for ever. We must not however imagine, that *every* rejection of the gospel is unpardonable; for that, which is occasioned by an ignorance of its true nature, may be forgiven;^e but it then becomes unpardonable, when it is wilful and deliberate, against the convictions of our conscience, and the dictates of an enlightened judgment. It then argues a mind given up to its own delusions, and sealed up under final impenitence; and *therefore* it cannot be forgiven, *because* it will never be repented of.]

There being no other limit to God's mercy, it is easy to see

II. To what it will extend

This only excepted, every species and degree of sin may be forgiven. This blessed truth may be abundantly proved

1. From scripture examples

[If we look at *sins committed before conversion*, we shall see every species of enormity has been pardoned. What horrible uncleanness had the Corinthians been guilty of! yet they were washed, justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.^f Murders have in some instances been, not only committed, but multiplied: yet Manasseh, who, in addition to the most impious idolatries, had "filled the streets of Jerusalem with the blood of innocents," was pardoned.^g The persecuting of God's church and people also, though it is like the "piercing of the apple of God's eye," has been forgiven; yea, Saul, the most furious of all zealots, was stopped in the midst of his outrages, and transformed into a blessed apostle, in order that he might be an everlasting monument of the power and grace of Christ. To sum up all in one; *the very murder of the Son of God himself* has been forgiven; and thousands of those who cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him," were converted in answer to that petition of our Lord, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

We may extend our observation also to *sins committed after*

^e 1 Tim. i. 13.

^f 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^g 2 Kings xxi. 16. with 2 Chron. xxiii. 9, 12, 13.

conversion. Who can contemplate without horror the conduct of David; who, though an eminent professor and patron of religion, defiled the wife of his faithful subject, and, in order to conceal his crime, laid a plot to destroy him? Consider him, I say, murdering this man who was exposing his life continually for his sake; murdering also a multitude of other persons together with him, involving another person in the guilt of all these murders as his instrument and accomplice, and making the very man, whose death he was contriving, the bearer of that letter, which was devoting him to destruction: consider him moreover, when he had accomplished his purpose, blasphemously ascribing the death of all these persons to God; then instantly taking the adulterous Bathsheba to live with him as his wife; and, after all, living at least nine months in utter impenitence, as though he had committed no crime at all: in an ignorant heathen, such conduct would have been inexpressibly vile; but in a saint of God, the man after God's own heart—who would conceive it possible? To believe that such iniquity was ever committed, seems almost a libel upon human nature. Yet even this, surpassing as it does almost the bounds of credibility, was forgiven, and that too, upon the very first motion of penitence in David's heart.^h Peter's sin, if viewed in all its aggravations, was scarcely less than this: yet, even while he was committing it, our Lord looked on him with pity and compassion; and afterwards thrice repeated the commission, which restored him openly to his apostleship.^{i]}

2. From scripture declarations

[Consult we *the prophets?* They speak strongly on this point, declaring that we are redeemed from *all sins*, even those of a scarlet or crimson die.^k Ask we of *the apostles?* They speak in terms of similar import,^l and contrast the gospel with the law in this particular; that whereas there were some sins, for which there was no sacrifice appointed under the law of Moses, there is no iniquity whatever from which we may not be justified by the gospel of Christ.^m If we attend to the voice of *Christ himself*, we shall find him no less explicit: he assures us that whosoever believeth in him shall never die, shall never be cast out.ⁿ Thus universally do the scriptures testify, that “*all manner of sin*,” yea, even the most horrid “blasphemies wherewith any man can blaspheme,” (except the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost) “shall be forgiven unto men.”

It must however be remembered, that these declarations

^h 2 Sam. xii. 13.

ⁱ John xxi. 15—17.

^k Ps. cxxx. 7, 8. Isaiah i. 18.

^l 1 John i. 7. and ii. 1, 2.

^m Acts xiii. 38, 39.

ⁿ John xi. 26. and vi. 37.

suppose that we repent and believe the gospel; for, without repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, no sin whatever can be pardoned.]

Before we close, it will be proper to add a word

1. Of admonition

[We hope and trust that there are not any in this day, who are guilty of the sin, which is here declared unpardonable: but many who scoff at religion, and deride the influences of the Spirit, may be much nearer to the commission of it than they imagine. It will be well for all such persons to pause, and consider on what a precipice they stand: for they may do despite to the spirit of grace till they have quenched his sacred motions, and provoked him to abandon them to their own delusions. The Lord grant that none of us may bring down on ourselves such a tremendous judgment!]

2. of consolation

[Some are tempted to think that they have committed the unpardonable sin: but if it be true, that the commission of it is always attended with judicial blindness, and followed by final impenitence, then no one can have committed it, who is apprehensive that he has; because, instead of indulging such fears, he would go on glorying in his shame, and hardening himself in his iniquities. Let all such apprehensions then be put away; and let that other declaration of the text abide upon our minds for our comfort and encouragement under all the accusations of a guilty conscience.]

CCCXII. THE EXTENT AND IMPORTANCE OF A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Matt. xvi. 24, 25. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it.*

THE precepts of the gospel are often considered as harsh and severe; but, if they were duly considered, there is not one of them, which would not appear highly reasonable—Perhaps there is not a stricter precept in the whole Bible than this before us, since it plainly declares, that no man shall ever enter into heaven, who is not willing to renounce every thing in the world, yea,

even his own life, for the sake of Christ. But can we think this too strict, if we observe the time and manner of its delivery? Our Lord had just foretold his own sufferings and death; and had reproved Peter with great severity for attempting to dissuade him from subjecting himself to such miseries: and “*then* it was, that he gave this injunction to his followers.” In this view we may conceive our Lord as saying, “Do I deny myself, and take up my cross, and even surrender up my life, from love to you? then do ye the same in obedience to me: if I do it willingly for your salvation, surely you cannot hesitate to do it for my glory.”

This precept then leads us to point out

I. The extent of a Christian’s duty

To be Christians indeed, we must enter in at a strait gate, and walk in a narrow way: we must

1. Deny ourselves

[Since the first introduction of sin into the world men have cast off the love and fear of God, and have subjected themselves to the dominion of *self*—Instead of conforming themselves to the will of their Maker, and living wholly for his glory, they have made their own will, the *principle*, and their own honour or interest, the *end*, of all their actions—Christianity is intended to bring us back to the state from which we are fallen—The very first step-towards our restoration is, to “deny *self*,” and to restore God to the dominion of which we have robbed him—Our enquiries must henceforth be, not, what do **I** choose? or, what will gratify *self*? but what does God command? and, what will glorify him?—To “put off the old man,” to “mortify the deeds of the body,” to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;” in a word, to deny self in all its actings, is the course, on which every Christian must enter, and which he must resolutely follow to the end of life—]

2. Take up our cross

[Every Christian must of necessity have some cross to bear: for though there will be seasons of comparative rest, when the storms of persecution shall subside, yet, as long as there are any of “the serpent’s seed” on earth, “the seed of the woman” will be treated by them as “the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things”—But to this the Christian must submit: he must not expect to be above his Master, but be willing to suffer in conformity to his example—He must not indeed bring trials on himself by his own misconduct:

but, if the cross lie in his way, he should not be solicitous to avoid it; but rather should take it up and carry it—Nor, while he is bearing the cross, should he account it an heavy and insupportable load; but should glory in it, and “rejoice that he is counted worthy” to bear it—This too should be the *daily* habit of his mind^a—Let us view a malefactor bearing to the place of execution a part of the cross whereon he is shortly to be fixed,^b and then we shall see the degraded state in which the Christian must be content to walk in the midst of an ungodly world—If he be regarded with even a shadow of respect, he must consider it as gain, for which he did not stipulate, and which he had no right to look for—]

3. Follow Christ

[While we profess to rely on Christ for our acceptance with God, we must also follow him as our pattern and example—In the whole of our conduct we must endeavour to “walk as he walked”—Though we are not to do in all respects the very things which he did, yet we are to manifest in all things the same spirit and temper—Like him, we must abhor sin even in thought; like him, sit loose to all the things of time and sense; like him, devote ourselves entirely to our God—Nor are we to draw back when persecution arises, but still to “follow our Lord without the camp, bearing his reproach”^c—Yea, if such a death awaited us as our Lord himself endured, we are not to shrink back from it, but to go boldly forward: the language of our hearts must be, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy”^d]—

Doubtless these things are difficult: but we shall not be deterred from duty by any difficulties, if we duly consider

II. The importance of it

On our faithfulness unto death our eternal salvation depends

It may be that we may be called to die for the sake of Christ

[In the first ages of Christianity, martyrdom for the truth was common: and, since its establishment in the world, thousands have been called to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Christ—Nor are we to conclude from the rest that we enjoy, that our faith and patience shall never be put to the test—Indeed, there are few, if any, real Christians, who are not on

^a Luke ix. 23.

^c Heb. xiii. 13

^b Hence the word *furcifer*.

^d Acts xx. 24.

some occasions made to endure the fiery trial, and to approve themselves as pure gold, by sustaining, without loss, the action of the fire—At all events we must in the habit of our minds be “ready, not only to be bound, but even to die at any time, and in any manner, for the name of the Lord Jesus”^e]

If, when called to suffer thus, we are found faithful, we shall be unspeakable gainers

[We are assured, not only in the text, but in many other places, that “if we suffer with Christ we shall also be glorified together with him;” and, that “our light and momentary afflictions shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”—Now what do we lose, when this poor frail life is taken from us? Nothing, but a few days or years of uncertain, and, at the best, painful existence upon earth—But what is our gain, the very instant our spirit has taken its flight? Who can conceive the rapture with which the disembodied soul will enter into the presence of its God? Who can form any idea of its joy, when it shall hear this plaudit from the Saviour’s lips, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”—Will any one *then* think he has endured too much for his divine Master? Will any one *then* regret that he had not continued longer in this wretched world, and purchased a temporary ease at the price of eternal glory?]—

If on the contrary we decline suffering, our loss will be inconceivably dreadful

[We are plainly warned that “if we deny Christ, he will deny us;” and that “if we draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in us”—What then will a man gain by sacrificing his principles to his fears? he will protract the little space allotted for his natural life, and save himself from a few minutes of pain and torture: but he will forfeit all hope of eternal glory, and subject himself to the wrath of an incensed God—It is but a few days at most, before he must resign the life, which he is now so averse to part with: and what will his feelings be when the Saviour of the world shall say, Depart from me, I never knew thee; thou hadst no regard for me; I told thee long since that, if thou wouldest save thy life by denying me, thou shouldst have no part with my faithful followers: these on my right hand “loved not their lives unto death;” but thou wast of “the fearful and unbelieving, and shall therefore take thy portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone”^f]—

Do not these considerations evince the importance of our duty? and should they not stimulate us to perform it in its utmost extent?]—

Amongst the many REFLECTIONS arising from this subject, we may observe

1. How different a thing is Christianity from what is generally supposed!

[It is generally thought that the embracing of certain tenets, with a conformity to some rites connected with them, is sufficient to constitute us real Christians—But religion is a practical thing: it enters into every part of our conduct; and must regulate us in every possible situation—It relaxes not its demands on account of any difficulties we may have to encounter; but provides us strength to surmount them, and a glorious reward when we have overcome—Let this then be fully known; that they, and they only, who, if put to the test, would be willing to die for Christ, are real Christians in the sight of God; and consequently, that they, and they only, will be saved in the day that he shall judge the quick and dead—How insufficient are we for these things; and how earnestly should we seek of God that grace which we stand in need of!—]

2. How vain are the excuses which men offer for their neglect of duty

[Every one is ready to urge the difficulties which lie in his way as an excuse for disobedience to the divine commands—But, what if our worldly interests be injured? what if we be called to “resist unto blood?” we must be stedfast, and immoveable—The only question is, Shall we obey God, or man? shall we regard our bodies, or our souls?—Excuses serve but to deceive and ruin us—Let us then put them all away; for God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked—]

3. How excellent a directory is here given us even in the most difficult cases!

[We may sometimes find it difficult to discern the path of duty: what then shall we do to avoid error? Let us follow the injunctions here given us. Let us enquire, What would my natural inclination lead me to; or, what would any unconverted person do in my circumstances? The very reverse of *that* is the line that I will pursue; for, while I deny myself, I cannot greatly err—Again, What would the Lord Jesus Christ do in my circumstances? *That* I will do; for I cannot do wrong when I follow him—Such questions as these would tend more to remove our difficulties than all the abstract reasonings that could be brought forward; for, we shall always find, that, *an upright heart is the best Casuist*—]

CCCXCIII. A CAUTION AGAINST DEPENDING UPON FUTURE TIME.

Prov. xxvii. 1. *Boast not thyself of to-morrow: for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*

THE opinions of men are not less opposite to the mind of God in what relates to practice, than in the most mysterious doctrines of our holy religion—We are told, that “the things of the Spirit are esteemed as foolishness by the natural man:” and to what an extent they are so, is visible in the commendation universally given to a worldly spirit, and in the contempt poured upon heavenly-mindedness, as though it were the offspring of folly and enthusiasm—But in the judgment of God there is no truer mark of wisdom than to consider earthly things as transient and worthless, and to place oneself continually as on the brink and precipice of eternity—To this effect Solomon speaks in the passage before us: in discoursing on which we shall

I: Explain the caution here given

It is of great importance to distinguish between *providing for* to-morrow, and *presuming upon* to-morrow: the former is necessary for our very existence, since without it, the whole world would be in a state of stagnation: but the acting as if we were certain of another day, is the error against which we are cautioned—Now we do this

1. When our affections are inordinately moved by present things

[If we feel eager *desires* after any earthly thing, so as to envy the possessors of it, and account the attainment of it necessary to our happiness; or, if we take such *delight* in what we do possess, as to forget that this world is not our rest, and that infinitely higher joys are prepared for us above; or if we *grieve* exceedingly on account of some loss we have sustained; we manifest that we have been promising ourselves many days, and even years to come: for would a person be very solicitous about a vanity that he thought might very probably last but a day? Or would he so congratulate himself on a possession which he apprehended to be of such short continuance? or would he lay so much to heart the loss of any thing which he had expected to enjoy but a little time?—

We cannot but see that in proportion as he was impressed with a sense of the shortness and uncertainty of time, and its nothingness in comparison of eternity, his affections would be moderated towards every object of time and sense: he would “rejoice as though he rejoiced not, and weep as though he wept not, and use every thing as not abusing it”—]

2. When we are but little interested about eternal things

[Every one knows that sin must be repented of; and that, if the guilt of it be imputed to us, we must perish—But this is not all: we must be born again and be made new creatures in Christ Jesus: and though this be not generally understood, every one has an idea that he must become religious before he die, if he would find acceptance with God in the world to come—Now if persons be deferring the great work of religion, whence can that delay arise but from their expectation of some more convenient season, when they shall execute their purposes of reformation and amendment?—Or if they commit sin, whence can they be emboldened to do so, but from a secret confidence that they shall live to repent of it; and to rectify what they know to be amiss?—Would any man deliberately do what he knows *must* be undone, or leave undone what he knows he *must* do in order to his eternal salvation, if he were *assured* that he had not one day more to live? And would not the *probable* nearness of death influence him in like manner *in proportion as it was felt?*—]

The whole world standing greatly in need of this caution, we proceed to

II. Enforce it

The reason urged by Solomon commends itself immediately to our hearts and consciences;

1. We know not what shall be on the morrow

[We are to-day perhaps enjoying all that our hearts can wish; our bodies are vigorous, our spirits gay, our friends numerous, our means of gratification greatly diversified, and accessible at all times—To-morrow we may be cast down from our pinnacle of happiness; our honour may be laid in the dust; we may be languishing on a bed of sickness; and deprived of all the comforts of life; and our reverse of fortune may be yet further aggravated by the loss of all our friends—The case of Job, if more recent instances were wanting, would sufficiently shew what may happen to us all^a—Shall

^a Job. i. See, in spiritual concerns, the case of David, Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

we then be promising ourselves years of happiness in the enjoyment of earthly things, when we consider how unstable they are?—Again: to-day we are sinning in expectation that we shall, at some future period, repent—To-morrow possibly we may, like Nebuchadnezzar, be deprived of reason; or, like Pharaoh, be sealed up by God under final impenitence—Now is it not madness to risk the salvation of our souls upon the hope of having every thing that can conduce to our eternal welfare continued to us to the latest period of our lives? Should we not rather set ourselves to redeem the present time, and to “work while it is day, lest the night should come wherein no man can work?”^b]—]

2. We know not whether we shall even live to see the morrow

[What man is there that has “made a covenant with death, and an agreement with the grave” so as to be assured he shall live another day? Has he this assurance *from within himself*, or *from those around him*, or *from God*? Not from within himself, since neither youth nor health is any security against the stroke of death: not from others, since physicians, however useful in their place, can afford us no help, when God shall call away our souls: not from God; for though he promised to protract Hezekiah’s life for fifteen years, he has not engaged to preserve ours so many minutes—If, with the rich man in the gospel, we are saying, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years,” God may say to us, “Thou fool, *this night* shall thy soul be required of thee”^c—Who then, that knows the uncertainty of life, will presume upon its continuance? Let us look at the many thousands who, though but lately they seemed as likely to live as ourselves, are gone into eternity, gone too, before they had prepared to give up their account to God; and surely we shall cry with the Psalmist, “Lord, so teach us to number our days, that we may instantly apply our hearts unto wisdom”^d]—]

This subject naturally leads us to ADDRESS

1. The careless

[Is it not sufficient that God has exercised such long-suffering towards you, but will you still continue to provoke him?^e—“O be wise, and consider your latter end”—“To-day while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts;” lest while you are saying, Peace and safety, sudden destruction come upon you^f]—

^b Eph. v. 16. John ix. 4.

^c Luke xii. 19, 20.

^d Ps. xc. 12.

^e James iv. 13—16.

^f Heb. iii. 7, 8, 13. 1 Thess. v. 3.

2. The lukewarm

[Lukewarmness in religion is as odious to God as an utter neglect of it^g—It is not by a round of formal duties, but a strenuous exertion of all your powers that you are to obtain the prize: for though heaven is the *gift* of God through Christ, it is bestowed on those only who labour for it^h—Whatever then your hand findeth to do, do it with all your mightⁱ]—

3. The zealous

[Endeavour to realize more and more the uncertainty of life, that, like the apostle, you may “die daily”—And, as you know not but that on the morrow you may be numbered with the saints in glory, let nothing be deferred till the morrow, which you can do for God to-day—Thus will death, however sudden, be welcome to you—]

^g Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^h John vi. 27.

ⁱ Eccl. ix. 10.

CCCXCIV. THE EVILS OF THE TONGUE.

James iii. 6. *The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. So is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

AMONGST the most important of all subjects must be reckoned the government of the tongue. The consideration of it is well calculated to convince the profane, to pluck off the mask from hypocrites, to humble the sincere, and to edify every description of persons. St. James, who intended his Epistle as a corrective to the abuses that prevailed in the Christian church, insisted strongly upon this subject: and, in the words before us, has given us such a description of the tongue, as, if it had proceeded from any other than an inspired writer, would have been deemed a libel upon human nature. In order that the text may be fully understood, we shall shew

I. The true character of the human tongue

The Apostle tells us “it is a fire”

[Fire, in its original formation, was intended for the good of man; and, when subordinated to his wishes, is highly bene-

ficial: but its tendency is to consume and to destroy. Thus the tongue was at first made for the Creator's praise; but through the introduction of sin, that member, which was, and, if well used, yet is, the glory of man,^a is become "an instrument of unrighteousness" and all iniquity.

Fire also, even the smallest spark, is capable of producing incalculable mischief; such mischief as it may not be in the power of man to repair. Thus also will one single motion of the tongue.^b It may so irritate and inflame a man, as to change him instantly into a savage beast, or an incarnate devil: and, if the whole world should labour to remedy the evil, it would mock their endeavours.]

He further adds, that it is "a world of iniquity"

[There is not any sin whatever, which does not stand in the nearest connexion with the tongue, and employ it in its service. Search the long catalogue of sins against God; then inspect those against our neighbour; and, lastly, those against ourselves; and there will not be found one, no, not one, that has not the tongue as its principal ally^c— — —All iniquities whatsoever centre in it, and are fulfilled by it: so justly is it called, "A world of iniquity."]

Its character will yet further appear by considering

II. Its effects

1. These are defiling

[Sin, as soon as ever it is conceived in the heart, defiles the soul: but when it is uttered by the lips, "it defileth the whole body." Utterance gives solidity and permanency to that, which before existed in idea, and might have passed away: and, inasmuch as the tongue has every other member at its command to execute, according to their several powers, the things it has divulged, the whole man is become a partaker of its guilt and defilement.^d And, though all its communications are not equally polluting, yet is there a stain left by means of them, a stain which nothing but the Redeemer's blood can ever wash away.]

2. Destructive

[To such an astonishing degree has this fire gained the ascendant, that it has "inflamed the whole course of nature." Look at *individuals*; what malignant passions has it kindled in them! Visit *families*; what animosities, and inextinguishable feuds has it produced! Survey *churches*; and you will find the unhallowed fire burning even in the sanctuary of God;^e

^a Ps. lvii. 8.

^b Ver. 3, 4.

^c See Rom. iii. 13, 14.

^d Eccl. v. 6. Mark vii. 20—23.

^e By means of heretics, cavillers, and proud disputers, and others who cause divisions and dissensions.

and sometimes too, even in the very censers of his ministers.^f Cast your eyes round upon whole *nations*; and you will perceive that, times without number, it has kindled the flames of war, and spread desolation through the globe.^{g]}

To prove that this account is not exaggerated, we shall point out

III. The reason of its producing these effects

The tongue “itself is set on fire of hell”

[Satan is the source and author of all the evils that proceed from the tongue. Does it falsify? behold, it does so at the instigation of that wicked fiend, “the father of lies.”^h Does it discourage men from the prosecution of their duty? It does so, as the devil’s agent.ⁱ Does it accuse and scandalize the people of God? Who but Satan is the author of such calumnies?^k Does it disseminate error? the propagator of that error is Satan’s minister; however he be transformed into an angel of light!^l Does it encourage any bad design? It is the devil himself who speaks by it.^m In every sin that it commits, it is actuated by “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in all the children of disobedience.”ⁿ Its whole “wisdom is earthly, sensual, *devilish*.^o It comes from hell, and leads to hell: and, if God were to withdraw his restraints here, as he does in hell, it would speedily produce a very hell upon earth.]

This alone can account for the effects that proceed from it

[Doubtless the wickedness of the heart may account for much: but, if the flames were not fanned by satanic agency; we can scarcely conceive that they should rage with such an irresistible force, and to such a boundless extent.]

INFER

1. How great must be the evil of the human heart!

[The heart is the fountain, in which “the evil treasure is;”^p the tongue is only the channel in which it flows. If the channel then be so vile, what must the fountain be? Yet every one of us has this tongue in his mouth, and this heart in his bosom: and, if God should leave us without restraint,

^f Alluding to Lev. x. 1.

^g What has not been perpetrated under the influence of those two words, liberty and equality!

^h Acts v. 3. John viii. 44.

ⁱ Matt. xvi. 23.

^k Rev. xii. 10.

^l 2 Cor. xi. 3, 13, 14, 15.

^m 1 Kings xxii. 21, 22.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 2.

^o Ver. 15.

^o Matt. xii. 35.

there is not one of us but would proclaim all the evil of his heart; as much as the most loathsome sensualist, or most daring blasphemer.]

2. How much do we need the influences of the Holy Spirit!

[It is absolutely impossible for man to tame this unruly member.^a Yet restrained it must be, if ever we would be saved.^r What then shall we do? shall we sit down in despair? God forbid. The Holy Spirit will help our infirmities,^s and Christ will give us his Spirit if we call upon him. Let us then look to Christ; and we shall prove by sweet experience, that his “grace is sufficient for us,”^t and that “through him strengthening us we can do all things.”^u]

3. How careful should we be of every word we utter!

[Immense injury may we do by one ungarded word. We may take away a character which we can never restore, or inflict a wound which we can never heal. On this account we should “set a watch before the door of our lips.”^x Nor is this a matter of expediency merely, but of necessity; for God has warned us that we shall give account of every idle word, and, that by our words we shall be justified, and by our words we shall be condemned.^y Let us then be utterly purposed that our mouth shall not offend.^z Let our tongue be as choice silver, or a tree of life, to enrich and comfort the Lord’s people.^a Let our “speech be alway with grace seasoned with salt” for the honour of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures.^b]

^a Ver. 7, 8.

^r James i. 26.

^s Rom. viii. 26.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^u Phil. iv. 13.

^x Ps. cxli. 3.

^y Matt. xii. 36, 37. and v. 22. last clause.

^z Ps. xvii. 3.

^a Prov. x. 20. and xv. 4.

^b Col. iv. 6. Eph. iv. 29.

CCCXCV. THE EXTENT AND CAUSES OF MEN’S SUPINENESS.

Hos. v. 4. *They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord.*

WHEN we exhort men to duty, they plead their inability to perform it—

But their inability is, in fact, a want of inclination to serve God—

Many things there are which they do not, though confessedly within their power—

Of this the prophet complains in the words of our text—

And traces it up to its true and proper source

His words lead us to consider

I. The extent of men's supineness

Little need be said to shew that the generality do not "turn to God"—

They are scarcely sensible of their apostasy from him—

They regard serious and vital religion as over-righteous preciseness—

They do not so much as "frame their doings to turn unto him"—

They do not consider their ways .

[This seems a reasonable duty, and within the reach of any man—

Every prudent man does it with respect to his temporal affairs—

Nor can there be any excuse for neglecting it in more important concerns—

Indeed it is not possible to turn *unto* God aright, unless we have first discovered wherein we have turned *from* him—

But men do not choose to search the records of their own conscience—

They find it more pleasant to rest in the presumption that all is well—

To this effect God himself testifies respecting them^a]]

They do not abstain from open violations of God's law

[This is undoubtedly a step, which, every one that turns to God, will take—

Nor, though this is more difficult, is it beyond the power of an unregenerate man—

Though he cannot refrain from the *love* of sin, he may from the *commission* of it—

Many actually do deny their appetites from prudential motives—

Yet few, if any, will impose the same restraints from a regard to God—

^a Jer. ii. 36.

Or manifest the disposition recommended to them by Elihu^b]—

They do not avoid the means and occasions of sin

[They have found the company of ungodly men to be a snare to their souls^c]—

Yet will they not withdraw themselves from their society—

From many other things have they experienced a most baneful influence—

Yet will they gratify themselves in all their wonted indulgences—

In temporal matters they see the wisdom of fleeing from temptation^d—

Yet they account it needless to shun the means of spiritual defilement—

But if they desired really to turn to God, could they evade the force of that question?^e]—

They do not use the means of obtaining true conversion

[They cannot but know the necessity of meditation and prayer—

They are well assured that an attention to God's word and ordinances is a principal mean of spiritual advancement—

Yet any book is more pleasing to them than the Bible, and any employment than prayer—

In seeking worldly advancement they will use the means with diligence—

But all labour is deemed superfluous in the concerns of the soul—]

They not only *do* not thus frame their doings, but they *will* not

[Not all the promises of God can allure, or threatenings alarm them—

They are deaf to the voice of conscience, and the dictates of God's Spirit—

The language of their hearts is like that of the Jews of old^f]—

They, on the contrary, frame their doings to turn as far as possible *from* God

[Would consideration help them? They banish it, with all books or conversation that might lead them to it—

Would the turning from known sin? They will indulge it—

Would the avoiding of the means of sin? They will rush into temptation—

^b Job. xxxiv. 32.

^c Exod. xxxiv. 12. Prov. xxii. 25.

^d From the course, or the gaming table.

^e Prov. vi. 27.

^f Jer. xliv. 16, 17.

Would the using of the means of grace? They account them a servile drudgery—

If they wished to injure their spiritual interests as much as possible, consistently with a good name among men, they could not adopt a surer method—

The whole of their conduct unequivocally declares the language of their hearts^g]—

To account for this supineness, let us trace it up to

II. The causes of it

Persons, when convicted of evil doings, will yet affirm their hearts to be good—

But can a tree be good whose fruits are uniformly bad?—

The causes of this evil are justly described by the prophet

1. They love sin

[“Whoredom” is frequently (and by Hosea in particular) used for sin in general—

A “spirit of whoredom” imports an attachment to sin, and delight in it^h—

Now this justly characterizes the state of fallen man—

It accords with other descriptions given of him in scriptureⁱ—

And is the fundamental cause of the supineness visible in the world—

In following evil ways we glide easily down the stream—

But in renouncing them we stem the tide of our corrupt nature—

Hence even the first steps of turning to God are irksome and difficult—

And we lay the rein on the neck of our appetites for want of resolution to restrain them—

In this very manner does God himself trace up our transgressions to a deceived heart^k]—

2. They are ignorant of God

[Never accustomed to reflect on God, they know nothing of him—

The ideas they do form of him are grossly erroneous^l—

In their hearts they “imagine him to be even such an one as themselves”

^g Job xxi. 14, 15.

^h In a similar sense *a spirit of slumber* is used, Rom. xi. 8.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 22, and Rom. viii. 7.

^k Isaiah xliv. 20.

^l Ps. xcvi. 7.

This is another, and a very fruitful source of their supineness—

To this St. Paul ascribes the evil of their hearts and lives^m—

If they knew his *power and majesty*, could they dare thus to provoke him?—

If they beheld his *holiness*, could they account sin so venial an evil?—

If they were apprised of his *justice*, would they indulge hopes of impunity?—

If they believed his *veracity*, would they so disregard his threatenings?—

Above all, if they knew his *mercy* to us in Christ Jesus, could they so trample on the blood that was shed for them?—

It would not be possible for them to withstand such views of his perfections—

Such a discovery would produce on them the effect experienced by St. Paulⁿ]—

INFER

1. They who shall perish at the last day must ascribe their condemnation to themselves

[It is certainly true that man is not able of himself to do all that is required of him—

But it is no less true that he is able to do many things which he neglects—

Nor can it be doubted but that, if he cried to God for help, he might obtain it—

If he use not therefore the power that he has, and the appointed means of obtaining more, he can blame none but himself—

In this view our Lord expressly declares that the fault is in our own perverse will^o—

And God expostulates with us on the folly of our conduct^p—

Is the husbandman justified in omitting to plow and sow his ground because he cannot insure a crop?—

How much less then shall we be, in neglecting the means to which God has promised success?—

Let us not then deceive ourselves by offering vain excuses—

But turn unto our God, and plead the mercy which he has promised to us^q]—

2. If we would fully turn unto our God, we must have our hearts renewed, and our minds enlightened with the knowledge of Christ

[Would we heal the streams? we must cast the salt into the fountain head^r—

^m Eph. iv. 18.

ⁿ Acts ix. 6.

^o John v. 40.

^p Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^q Jer. ii. 12.

^r 2 Kings ii. 21, 22.

Instead of being actuated by the spirit of whoredoms, we must pray to be “led by the Spirit of God”—

Instead of “abiding in darkness,” we must seek to have “Christ revealed in us”—

Thus shall “old things pass away, and all things become new”—

We shall sweetly yield ourselves to the constraining influence of Christ’s love—

And not only turn, but “cleave, unto him with full purpose of heart”—]

CCCXCVI. THE DANGER OF DEFILING GOD’S TEMPLE.

1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

EVERY passion of the human mind should be called forth in aid of vital godliness. The saints indeed are more influenced by considerations that excite their love and gratitude: but they still need to be sometimes impressed with truths that may awaken an holy fear and jealousy, especially when their conduct has been such as to deserve reproof. The Corinthians were in an high degree culpable on account of their contentions: the Apostle therefore warns them of the consequences of acting in a manner so unworthy of their profession.

In discoursing on his words, we shall consider

I. The acknowledged privilege of Christians

Christians, like the temple of old, are the habitation of God

[The temple was the place where God dwelt in a more especial manner. Not only was the visible symbol of his presence there, but there also he manifested himself to his people in tokens of his love and communications of his grace. Thus does he also now reveal himself in his church:^a yea, every individual believer is thus consecrated to his service, and honoured as his immediate residence.^{b]}]

^a Eph. ii. 20—22.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 16.

Nor is this a doubtful, but a clear acknowledged privilege

[Ignorant people may doubt “whether there be any Holy Ghost:^c” but true Christians know him, and know themselves to be his habitation. St. Paul appealed to the Corinthians respecting this, not imagining that any one of them could entertain a doubt of it. They must have read of it in the Jewish scriptures:^d often too must they have heard it from him: nor could they fail of knowing it from their own experience. If for an instant they reflected on the light, the strength, the consolations with which they had been favoured, they could not but ascribe them to the agency of God’s spirit; and consequently they must be conscious of his dwelling in them as in his temple. Believers at this day have certainly not less grounds for drawing the same inference with respect to themselves; and therefore they may, and ought to know, that they are in the actual enjoyment of this privilege.]

But as this privilege is attended both with duties and dangers, let us consider

II. The declaration founded upon it

God denounces the heaviest judgments against those who abuse this privilege

[He would not suffer any unclean person to enter into his temple of old, however free he might be from *moral* pollution, or however ignorantly he might have contracted his *ceremonial* defilement.^e These ordinances were intended to shew that sin of any kind, and much more such as now prevailed among the Christians at Corinth, was extremely hateful in his sight: such purity does he require in all that come nigh unto him. Doubtless there are errors both in faith and practice, which, though injurious to his people’s happiness,^f will not destroy the relation that subsists between him and them:^g but, if they be of such a kind as to affect the foundation of the Christian’s hope, or greatly to dishonour the superstructure, they will surely bring down the divine judgments on all who harbour them.^h]

This denunciation is even founded on the privilege itself

[Why was God so jealous of the honour of his temple, but because it was his immediate residence? the more inti-

^c Acts xix. 2.

^d Isaiah lxvi. 1, 2.

^e Numb. xix. 13.

^f Ver. 15.

^g Ver. 12—15.

^h Φθείρει, must import such a degree of defilement as has a tendency to destroy; because the destruction menaced is also expressed by the word φθείρει.

mately it was connected with him, the more was he himself dishonoured by any pollutions introduced into it. Thus we also, instead of having any reason to hope for impunity on account of our relation to him, are taught to expect rather the heavier indignation, if we provoke the eyes of his glory.ⁱ]

IMPROVEMENT

1. Let us seek to possess this great privilege

[As to be visited by an earthly monarch would be a higher honour than to be admitted into his palace, so to have God dwelling in our hearts on earth is even a higher honour than to be admitted into his temple above. Shall we not then be solicitous to obtain it? when God has designed that we should even know ourselves possessed of it, and enjoy all the happiness arising from it, shall we treat it with contempt, as a mere phantom of a heated imagination? Let us open wide the doors of our hearts, that the King of glory may enter in.^k]

2. Let us be careful lest we abuse this privilege

[Doctrines arising from human systems, even though they be true in themselves, must never be pressed into the service of sin, or be brought to enervate the force of declarations, which, though apparently opposite, are equally clear and true.^l If some truths are revealed for the confirming of our stability, others are intended to create within us a holy jealousy. Instead therefore of attempting to invalidate the declaration before us, let us flee from those defilements which alone can make it formidable. Let us maintain that purity of heart which God requires, and study to "be holy as God is holy." This was the Apostle's most ardent wish for his converts;^m and it should be the one continued object of our ambition.ⁿ]

ⁱ Amos iii. 2.

^k Ps. xxiv. 7.

^l Rev. ii. 5, 16.

^m 1 Thess. v. 23.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

CCCXCVII. THE DANGER OF WILFUL AND OBSTINATE DISOBEDIENCE.

Exod. xxiii. 20—22. *Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not: for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But, if thou shalt indeed obey his*

voice, and do all that I speak, then will I be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

IT is but too common for men to cast the blame of their own negligence on God—

But they who labour so much to exculpate themselves now, will one day be silent—

And God will finally be justified in every sentence that he shall pass—

His kindness to the church of old may shew us what his conduct is towards *us*—

And they who are thus guided, warned, and encouraged, must, if they perish, ascribe their condemnation to themselves alone—

The words before us contain

I. The work and office of Christ

Christ is here called an angel or messenger

[He is often called by this name in the holy scriptures^a— Nor does he disdain to assume it himself^b—

In his essential nature indeed he is equal with the Father—

But in his mediatorial capacity he sustains the office of a servant—]

As the angel of the covenant, he leads and keeps his people

[He is represented as a leader and commander, like Joshua his type^c—

He went before them in the wilderness in the pillar and the cloud—

And still, though invisibly, guides them in their way to heaven^d—]

Nor does he leave them till he brings them safely to glory

[He did not forsake the Israelites, till he had accomplished all his promises^e—

Having “prepared the land for them,” he preserved them for it—

^a He is the angel that was in the pillar and the cloud, Exod. xiv. 19. That angel was Jehovah, Exod. xiii. 21. That Jehovah was Christ, 1 Cor. x. 9. See also Mal. iii. 1.

^b John xii. 49.

^c Isaiah lv. 4.

^d Ps. xxv. 9. and xxxii. 8.

^e Josh. xxiii. 14.

Thus has he “prepared mansions for us” also—

And will surely bring us to the full possession of them^g]

But as this office of Christ implies a correspondent duty in us, God suggests

II. A caution against neglecting him

We are much in danger of displeasing him

[As our guide, he expects implicit obedience—

Nor can we rebel against him without “provoking” his indignation^h—

Hence we need continual circumspectionⁱ—]

The consequence of displeasing him will be very terrible

[Doubtless to penitents he is full of mercy and compassion—

But to impenitent offenders he will manifest his wrath^k—

Nor will he suffer any to continue in their sins with impunity^l—]

His power and dignity are a certain pledge to us that he will avenge the insults that are offered him

[By “the name of God” we understand not his authority only, but his very nature^m—

And this union with the Father is a pledge to us, that he will act as becomes the divine character—

Nor will any consideration of mercy ever tempt him again to sacrifice the honour of the Deity to the interest of man—]

It is not however by terror only that God would persuade us; for he adds

III. An encouragement to obey him

Obedience is in some sense the condition of God’s favour

[We know that there is nothing meritorious in man’s obedience—

Yet is there an inseparable connexion between that and the divine favour—

Nor is it a partial obedience only that he requires at our hands—

It must be earnest, unwearied, uniform, and unreserved—]

^f John xiv. 2.

^g 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

^b Isaiah Ixiii. 10.

ⁱ Ver. 13.

^k Ps. vii. 11—13.

^l Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14.

^m John xiv. 10, 11. and x. 30.

And to those who yield him this obedience he will shew himself an active friend, and an almighty protector

[His favour consists not in a mere inactive complacency—

It will manifest itself in a constant and powerful interposition on their behalfⁿ—

He will not fail to secure them the victory over all their enemies—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who disregard the voice of this divine messenger

[From what is spoken of his mercy you are ready to think him destitute of justice—

And from the depth of his condescension you conclude he will not vindicate his own honour—

But where God most fully proclaims his mercy he declares his justice also^o—

Make not him then your enemy who came from heaven to save you—

Consider what means he has used to guide you to the promised land—

— what great things he would do for you, if you would obey his voice—

— what certain and terrible destruction your rejection of his mercy will bring upon you^p—

And instantly surrender up yourselves to his direction and government—]

2. Those, who though they submit to his government, are doubtful of success

[The Israelites, notwithstanding all the miracles they had seen, were afraid they should not finally attain the object of their desires—

Thus amongst ourselves, many tremble lest their expectations should never be realized—

But is not God able to beat down your enemies before you?—

Or will he forget the promise he has so often renewed?—

If he be incensed against you, it is not owing to unfaithfulness in him, but to instability in you^q—

Only be vigilant to obey his will, and to *follow him fully*—

And you need not doubt but that he will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom^r—]

ⁿ 2 Chron. xxxii. 8. Isaiah xlix. 25.

^o Heb. xii. 25.

^p Jer. ii. 17.

^q Exod. xxxiv. 7.

^r 2 Tim. iv. 18.

3. Those who are following him with cheerfulness to the heavenly land

[Blessed be God, there are some of you like-minded with Joshua and Caleb^s—

And are not you living monuments of the power and grace of God?—

Have you not on many occasions proved his readiness to pardon sin?—

And do you not daily experience his paternal care and protection?—

Go on then with increasing vigilance and an assured hope—

Know that all the power and perfections of God are engaged for you—

And that “having guided you by his counsel, he will finally bring you to glory”—]

^s Numb. xiv. 24. and xxxii. 12.

CCCXCVIII. CHRISTIANS ARE NOT OF THE WORLD.

John xvii. 16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

SUCH is the enmity of a carnal mind to the will and law of God, that men usually hate us most for those very things which render us most acceptable in the sight of God—The sanctity of Abel was the real ground of the inveterate hatred that rankled in the breast of Cain, and that impelled him to destroy his brother whom he could not imitate—And David in his day complained, that when he put on sackcloth and chastened his soul with fasting, pleasing as that conduct must have been to God, profane scoffers turned it to his reproach—Thus our Lord told his disciples that the world would hate them because they did not conform themselves to its habits: but at the same time, repeating what he had spoken of their holy singularity, he pleads it as an argument with his heavenly Father to interpose more effectually for their preservation from evil, and their sanctification through his truth^a—The assertion before us leads us to shew

^a Ver. 14—17.

I. In what respects Christ was not of the world

Our Lord fulfilled with the utmost exactness all his social and relative duties, and wrought, till the age of thirty, at his father's trade^b—But though he filled up his proper station *in* the world, he was not *of* the world

1. In his spirit and temper

[A levity of mind, a disregard of God, and an indifference about eternal things, characterize the generality of mankind—But no such disposition was ever seen in our adorable Emmanuel—A holy gravity invariably marked his demeanor: he had a continual sense of the divine presence, a deep impression of the importance of time, and an unremitting zeal to finish the work assigned him—“It was his meat and drink to do the will of him that sent him”—]

2. In his desires and pursuits

[The world affect nothing but the things of time and sense: pleasures, riches, and honour are the idols which they worship—But our Lord desired none of these things—Had he wished for *pleasure*, he had a mind and body framed for the most exquisite delights of which our nature is capable: as his bodily organs were not weakened by any sinful habit, so his intellectual faculties were capable of comprehending all the wonders of creation, and of deriving the sublimest pleasure from the contemplation of them—But he was occupied with thoughts widely different from these: he found no time for the amusing speculations of philosophers—He had come to atone for sin; and, that he might do so, chose rather to be “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”—Had he desired *riches*, how easily could he, who commanded a fish to bring him a piece of money to pay his tax, have possessed himself of inexhaustible stores of silver and gold! But he chose rather to be destitute even of a place where to lay his head, and to be a pensioner upon the bounty of some pious women^c—He did indeed carry a purse, but it was not for the procuring of superfluities for himself, but that he might administer to the necessities of the poor—Had he been ambitious of *honour*, with what crowds of followers might he have been attended, all of them monuments of his tender compassion and almighty power! But he dismissed them from him, and frequently with the most solemn charges, that they should tell no man what he had done for them: and when the people would have taken him by force to make him a king he rendered himself invisible, and withdrew from them—So little did he covet

^b Mark vi. 3.

^c Luke viii. 3. and ix. 58.

what the foolish world admire; and so different was he from the world in the whole of his deportment—]

Singular as he appeared in his day, it will be found

II. That his disciples all resemble him

The followers of Christ, whatever attainments they may have made, were once “walking after the course of this world even as others;” but the very instant that they obtain a saving knowledge of their Lord, they begin to tread in his steps and imitate his example:^a “as they have once borne the image of their earthly father, they now bear the image of the heavenly”

1. They indulge not a worldly spirit

[Believers are not free from the imperfections of their former state; their constitutional or acquired habits still in some measure remain: hence one is yet too easily drawn aside to levity, another to earthly-mindedness, and all to the “sins which most easily beset them;” but this is their pain, their grief, their burthen: they desire from their inmost souls to be delivered from such a spirit: though they too often fall into it, they would not *indulge* it: they would far rather have their souls nourished with spiritual blessings; and would account it an infinitely richer mercy to receive an increase of grace and peace, than to enjoy all the wealth or pleasure that the world can bestow—]

2. Nor do they affect worldly company

[From their situations in social life they are necessitated to have much intercourse with the men of this world: but they regard the world as a physician does an hospital which it is his office to attend: they consider it as the theatre on which they are called to act; and they endeavour to approve themselves to God and to their fellow-creatures by a diligent discharge of their duty: while in it, they seek the good of those around them, and study to improve themselves by all which they see: but they take not up their abode there; they are glad to retire from it when their work is finished: their friends and companions are selected from among another people; their “delight is in the saints that are in the earth, and in such as excel in virtue;” they shew by their conduct that “light cannot have communion with darkness, nor Christ with Belial, nor he that believeth with an unbeliever;”^b and, like Moses, they would rather suffer affliction with the people of God than participate the pleasures and honours of a court^c]—

^a Gal. vi. 14.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

^c Heb. xi. 24—26.

3. Nor are they engrossed with worldly pursuits

[They are not indifferent about the things of this world, nor are they of necessity precluded from the enjoyment of them when God in his providence casts them into their lap; they may even seek these things in subordination and subserviency to their more important concerns—But they will not be *engrossed* with such mean pursuits: they will not suffer their affections to be set on such worthless objects: their hearts are in heaven, and their “conversation also is in heaven”—They seek “pleasures which are at God’s right hand for evermore;” they labour to be “rich towards God in faith and good works;” and they aspire after “the honour that cometh of God,” the honour of being “children of God, yea, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ”—And though much time and thought is spent by them in things relating to the world, yet when at liberty to follow the bent of their minds, they return to God as their beloved, their only rest—]

We shall conclude the subject with some suitable
ADVICE

1. Guard against the self-deception which too generally prevails

[We have reason at this time to adopt the apostle’s words, and say, that “many walk, of whom we have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, and that their end will be destruction, because they *mind earthly things*”^g—There are, alas! too many who “call Christ, Lord, Lord, but will not obey his commands,” or “walk as he walked”—But let us remember, that “the tree must be known by its fruit;” and that we must judge of our interest in Christ by our conformity to his image: if our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows be excited *principally* by worldly things, we certainly are of the world: but if with Christ, we be crucified to the world,” and our spirit and temper, our desires and pursuits resemble his, then, and then only, may we conclude that we are Christ’s; for “all that are born of God have overcome the world; and all that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”^h—]

2. Be not afraid of a necessary singularity

[We would not recommend a *needless* singularity, or insinuate that there is any virtue in making ourselves appear ridiculous—But whereinsoever the world deviate from the mind and will of God, there we may, and *must* differ from them—If we be singular, the fault will be theirs and not ours—

^g Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^h 1 John v. 4. Gal. v. 24.

No blame can attach to our Lord because he was singular; nor can it to us while we "shine as lights in the dark world," "holding forth in our conduct the word of life"—We should "make our light to shine before men," and be "as a city set upon an hill"—And though the besotted world will "gaze strangely at us, and wonder that we run not with them to their access of riot," we shall have enough to counterbalance their contempt in the testimony of our own consciences, and in the approbation of our God—We know that it is our duty to despise all the vanities which the world can offer us;ⁱ and that, if we would not be found enemies of God in the last day, we must relinquish all desire after that friendship of the world, which is enmity with God:^k let us therefore go on boldly in the way of duty, and, if we meet with a cross in our road, let us not turn aside from it, but take it up and glory in it—]

3. Seek more and more conformity to the Saviour's image

[The command of God is, "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds"—The way in which we are to comply with this command is set before us in our Lord's example—We are not indeed to attempt the things which were peculiar to him as a prophet of the most high God; but to get the same mind which was in him; to imitate him in his spirit and temper, and to manifest the same superiority to things visible and temporal, and the same decided preference for things invisible and eternal—Then, like the higher regions of the atmosphere, we shall remain serene, while those who grovel on the earth are agitated by incessant tempests—"Come out then from the world and be separate; and touch not the unclean thing, and God will be a father unto you, and ye shall be his sons and daughters;" and know that the more your conversation is in heaven now, the greater will be your meetness for it whenever you shall be called hence—]

ⁱ 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^k James iv. 4.

^l 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

CCCXCIX. FRIENDSHIP OF THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD.

James iv. 4. *Ye adulterers, and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God! Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.*

THERE is a boldness of speech, which, not only comports well with the character of God's ambassadors;

but is necessary to the faithful discharge of the ministerial office. To those who are unused to the figurative language of scripture, the address of St. James to the professors of Christianity may appear coarse and severe. But the truth he delivered, needed to be strongly insisted on even in the apostolic age; so much did the practice of the church fall short of the knowledge which was at that time generally diffused. As to the application which he gave the worldly, temporizing Christians, it could not fail of being understood in its proper sense; because all knew that God called himself the husband of the church; and, consequently, that the violation of the people's engagements to him justly entitled them to the name by which they were addressed.

To the Christians of this age the doctrine of the text should be very fully opened. It is indeed far from being calculated to please men: but we proceed to the consideration of it, in the hope that the word shall not go forth in vain.

We shall endeavour to shew

I. What we are to understand by the friendship of the world

[The "world" must be understood in its largest sense, as comprehending not only the people, but also the pleasures, riches and honours of the world.^a To draw the precise limits of that which is here called "the friendship" of the world, is not so easy. Nevertheless we may ascertain this with as much accuracy as is necessary on the present occasion.

If we love any one person above all others, and strive to please him habitually, not only in common with others, but even in direct opposition to them, we certainly must be acknowledged to have a considerable degree of friendship for him. Let us enquire then,

1. Which do we love the more; the world, or God?— — —
2. Which do we strive to please when their commands are irreconcileable with each other?— — —

If conscience testify that the world have in these respects a decided preference, we are, beyond all doubt, the friends of the world.]

II. In what respects it is enmity with God

[This may seem a strong expression; but it does not exceed the truth. For the friendship of the world is, in fact, a

denial of God's excellency, since it declares that the world is a better portion than he— — It is a *contempt of his authority*, seeing that when he says, “ My son, give me thy heart,” it makes us reply with Pharaoh, “ Who is the Lord, that I should serve him? I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice”— — It is also a *violation of our most solemn engagements with him*. He is our husband; and we bound ourselves to him in baptism to “ renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and to be his, even his only. But by receiving the world to our bosom, we suffer that to invade his property; and, as the text intimates, are guilty of spiritual adultery — — Moreover it is (as far as our influence extends) a *banishing of the very remembrance of him from the earth*. God himself testifies respecting the friends of the world, that “ he is not in all their thoughts:” and it is certain that, while they can converse readily on every worldly subject, they like not to hear or speak of his name: and if there were not a few who stand forth as his witnesses upon earth, his very name would soon be blotted out of our remembrance— —

If the friends of the world would view their conduct in this light, they would see an extreme malignity in the practices which they now maintain and justify: and they would tremble at the thought of being found enemies to HIM, who, as omniscient, sees; as holy, hates; as just, condemns; and, as almighty, will punish, such daring impiety.]

III. The state of those who cultivate it

[Nothing can be more express than the declaration of the text: they are “ enemies of God.” Whether they intend it or not, whether they think of it or not, *they are enemies of God*. However sober, modest, kind, generous, and amiable they may be in their deportment, they still are *enemies of God*. Exalt their characters ever so highly, so that they shall appear in the most enviable light, you must bring them down at last with this melancholy exception, *but “ they are enemies of God”*^b— —

Nor is this a matter that admits of doubt. St. James even appealed to the very persons whom he was condemning, and made them judges in their own cause; “ Know ye not this?” can ye doubt of it one moment? does not the scripture fully declare it? does not experience universally attest it?

But there is an emphasis in the text that marks this truth in the strongest manner. As an avowed desire to compass the death of the king is treason, though that wish should never be accomplished; so the determining to maintain friendship with the world, when God commands us to “ come out from it and be separate,” is treason against the King of kings: the

^b 2 Kings v. 1.

very willing to side in this manner with the world; constitutes^c us enemies of God.]

ADDRESS

1. The friends of the world

[It is to be feared that even in a Christian assembly the doctrine of the text will be called in question; and that many, whose conduct in other respects is unexceptionable, impute no blame to themselves for their attachment to the world. Yea, so ignorant of their duty are the generality of Christians, that instead of saying, *Know ye not*, we must rather say to them, *Know ye* that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? For, alas! few in this day seem to know it; or even to suspect it. But so it is, whether we know it or not. Let none therefore deceive themselves, or attempt to unite friendship with the world with friendship with God; for that is impossible: our Lord has said, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”]

2. The friends of God

[It is a great mercy to be “delivered from the love of this present world.” But we may mistake our experience with respect to this. Age, sickness, poverty, disappointment, and other trials may render us *apparently* indifferent to the world, while yet, in other circumstances, our old attachment to it would revive. Let us take care therefore that our friendship with God, and our delight in him, proportionably increase. When one scale descends, the other must rise. We must guard also against a relapse; for the world is ever soliciting a place in our affections; and if we be not on our guard, we shall, like Demas, forsake the path of self-denial for the more enchanting one of earthliness and self-indulgence.^d]

^c “Ος ἡν βεληθη, καθισται.

^d 2 Tim. iv. 10.

CCCC. MODERATION IN THE USE OF EARTHLY THINGS INculcated.

1. Cor. vii. 29—31. *This I say, brethren, The time is short: It remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

IT is no considerable part of Christian wisdom to distinguish clearly between things lawful, things expe-

dient, and things necessary: since many things must be reduced under one or the other of these heads according to circumstances connected with them—The apostle is writing upon the subject of marriage; and gives it as his opinion, that though at all times lawful, and to some persons necessary, it was, at that particular season, inexpedient for those who could conveniently abstain from it; because the cares necessarily attendant on a married life would increase their difficulties during the present persecuted and afflicted state of the church—But, while they were all left at liberty respecting the line of conduct they would pursue in relation to this, he solemnly warns them, that the same abstraction from worldly cares, and indifference to worldly pleasure, were necessary for all who would approve themselves to God—As his words equally concern the church of God in all ages, it will be proper to consider

I. The direction given us with respect to the things of time and sense

It is but too obvious that men's regards to this world are, for the most part, inordinate and excessive

[If all do not set their hearts upon the same object, there is something which every unconverted man regards with an idolatrous attachment—Has he some prospect of attaining it? his mind goes forth to it in warm and eager desire—Is there reason to apprehend a disappointment respecting it? he is kept in anxious suspense, as though all his happiness were bound up in it—Is he brought to the possession of it? he congratulates himself as having reached the summit of his wishes, and thinks he can never lend himself too much to the enjoyment of his newly acquired comforts—Is he by any means bereaved of his beloved idol? what vexation of mind, and what dissatisfaction with the dispensations of Providence does he feel! He is so entirely swallowed up in sorrow for his loss, as to be insensible of all his remaining blessings—Of course, men will differ widely as to the particular gratification which they affect: some find their delight centered in their wife or children; others in their wealth and honour; others in their ease and pleasure; and others again in some indulgences, which habit has rendered essential to their happiness: but the same love of carnal things, however diversified as to its objects, pervades mankind of all ages and of all descriptions—]

But we should maintain an equableness of mind under all circumstances, however pleasing or afflictive

[We are not required to exercise a stoical apathy under the various events of life; we may rejoice or weep, according as the occurrences of the day are suited to excite the affection of joy or sorrow—But “our moderation should be known unto all men;” nor should any thing of a temporal nature so occupy our minds, as to make us forget that we have concerns of infinitely greater importance—Have we “formed a connexion” that promises us the highest bliss? we should so enjoy the creature as to be ready to surrender it up again to God, whensoever he may be pleased to call for it—Are we “weeping” for the loss of a dear relative, or on account of any other calamity? we should not so give way to sorrow as to forget that we have God for our friend, and heaven for our inheritance—Has any thing of a very “joyous” nature befallen us? we should still remember, how unsatisfying it is in its nature, how contracted in its use, how precarious in its continuance, and how short in its duration; and we should regulate our joy by such considerations as these—Have we been blessed with such success, that we are enabled to “purchase” great possessions? we should be watchful over our spirits, that we do not say, like the fool in the gospel, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry^a—And while we “use” our good things with thankfulness to the donor, we should be careful never to “abuse” them to the purposes of pride, intemperance, and carnal ease—]

This direction derives great force and importance from

II. The reason with which it is enforced

Every thing here below is transient and of short duration

“Time is short;” if our days be extended to seventy or eighty years, the whole period of our existence will appear but, as it were, “a span long,” when we come to the close of it: or, if we compare it with eternity, it is no more than the twinkling of an eye—Moreover, while our lives, like a sail that is furled, are every moment contracting, every thing around us also is drawing to a close^b—As actors on the stage perform the part assigned them, and each succeeding scene brings their fictitious joys or sorrows to a speedy termination, so we make our appearance on the stage of life; and, having

^a Luke xii. 18, 19.

^b Συνεταλμένος translatione e Velis sumpta—Beza.

sustained the character allotted us by the disposer of all events, soon bid adieu to all these transient scenes, and enter on a state of everlasting bliss or woe^c—Or as men please themselves with some empty show, that passes in procession before their eyes, but it is scarcely come fully into view before it begins to recede, and in a little time totally disappears; so we scarcely behold the glare and glitter of this vain world, before the enchanting prospect vanishes, and the phantom passes onward, to astonish and delude succeeding generations—]

Can there be any stronger argument for sitting loose to the things of time and sense?

[Where either our joys or our sorrows permanent, there would be some reason for having our minds deeply affected with them: but when we know that a few months or years must put an end to every present sensation, does it become us to be much elated with what is pleasing, or much depressed with what is painful?—Should not the infinitely greater importance of eternal things so engross our minds, as to render every temporal concern comparatively trivial—Should not the prospect of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ cause us to estimate our happiness by a far different standard, and to consider ourselves in a blessed or miserable state, not so much by what we enjoy or suffer in this present world, as by our preparation to give up our account to God, and our hope of an approving sentence from the Judge of quick and dead?—Let then the transitoriness of earthly things moderate our affection to them, that whether we attain and enjoy them, or lose and want them, we may still have God as our abiding and all-sufficient portion—]

ADDRESS

1. The young and inexperienced

[You are ready to imagine that some change in your circumstances, to which you look forward, or perhaps which you rather wish for than expect, would make your cup to overflow with joy, and perfectly satisfy your most enlarged desires—But be assured that, if you could at this moment possess all that your heart can wish, you would be quickly constrained to confirm the testimony of Solomon, that, It is “all vanity and vexation of spirit”—Happy would it be for you if you could be prevailed upon to purchase your experience at the expence of others; and not, like those who have gone before you, grasp at a shadow till you lose the substance—Ask those who are old and grey-headed, whether they have not found the world to be “a vain show, wherein men dis-

^c Σκηνα is thought by some to convey this idea: others think it refers rather to a passing spectacle.

quiet themselves in vain?"^d And ask the godly in particular, Whether they who fear God have not a truer enjoyment even of this present world, than the votaries of gain or pleasure?^e —Or rather we would say, attend to God's expostulation, and obey his voice; " Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness"^f—]

2. Those who have grown old in the service of the world

[Lamentable it is, that the very persons who have found the insufficiency of the world to make them happy, are still as regardless of the eternal world, as those who are just entering on the delusive path.—If age or experience have blunted the edge of their feelings with respect to present things, they are as insensible as ever either of pain or pleasure from spiritual concerns: nor are they at all more stimulated to improve the time that remains to them, than if their eternal interests were of no value—Yea, age has often no other effect than to confirm the errors, and rivet the prejudices, of their former years—Enquire, brethren, whether you have profited by your experience; and whether you be now " setting your affections on things above, and not upon things below?"^g— You have hitherto regarded the blessed Saviour, and your own immortal soul, as though you regarded them not; and suffered your whole heart to be occupied about the world—Now reverse your conduct, and all will yet be well: let the greatest concerns of time and sense make but a light impression on your minds; and let an interest in Christ, and the salvation of your soul, be regarded henceforth as *the one thing needful*.— "Be no longer fools, but wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil:"^h and while the fashion of this world is passing away, endeavour to secure an " incorruptible inheritance in heaven"—]

^d Ps. xxxvii. 6. ^e 1 Tim. vi. 17. Matt. v. 5. ^f Isaiah lv. 2.

^g Col. iii. 2. ^h Eph. v. 15. 16.

CCCCI. MORTIFICATION OF SIN.

Rom. viii. 13. *If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

IT is of infinite importance to know our state as it is before God, and to ascertain on scriptural grounds, what

our condition will be in the eternal world. Numberless are the passages of God's word which will afford us the desired information: but there is not in the whole inspired volume one declaration more explicit than that before us. It presents to our view two momentous truths, which, as they admit not of any clearer division or arrangement, we shall consider in their order.

I. A carnal life will terminate in everlasting misery

To "live after the flesh" is, to make the gratifying of our corrupt nature the great scope and end of our lives

[The "flesh" does not relate merely to the body, but to the whole of our corrupt nature. It is used to signify that innate principle of sin, which governs the unregenerate, and continually fights against the spiritual principle in those that are regenerate.^a And its fruits comprehend the actings of the mind, no less than those of the body.^b To "live after" this corrupt principle, is to, be governed by it in all our deliberations and pursuits. It signifies nothing what may be the immediate path which we choose for ourselves, provided our main object be to gratify ourselves. One may seek pleasure, another riches; another honour, another the knowledge of arts and sciences; but if they have no higher end of life than to attain these things, they all equally live after the flesh.^c]

The consequence of such a life will be eternal death

[The death mentioned in the text cannot relate to the mere death of the body, because that must be experienced by the spiritual, no less than by the carnal man: It must import that death of the soul, which is emphatically called the second death.^d Nor can there be a doubt but that this will be the fruit and consequence of a carnal life. And shall this be thought an hard saying? Surely not: for such a sentence is only a repetition of what the person has before passed upon himself: he has *practically* said to God, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways;^e I will be a god to myself,^f and make myself happy in my own way." God replies to him, "Thou wouldest none of me; and thou shalt have none of me; depart from me for evermore."^g The very state in which they lived, was a state of spiritual death;^h no wonder therefore that it terminates in everlasting death.]

^a John iii. 6. Gal. v. 17.

^b Gal. v. 19, 20.

^c Compare ver. 5. with Phil. iii. 19

^d Rev xx. 14

^e Job xxi. 14, 15.

^f Ps. xii. 4.

^g Compare Ps. lxxvi. 11. with Matt. xxv. 41. ^h Ver. 6.

As a counterpoise to the apparent severity of this truth, the Apostle adds, that

II. A life of mortification and self-denial shall terminate in everlasting happiness

To mortify our corrupt nature ought to be the continual aim of our lives

[The “deeds of the body” are of the same import with “the flesh” in the preceding clause. Our corrupt nature is often represented as a body, because it has many parts or members whereby it acts.ⁱ This we should endeavour to mortify in its outward actings, and in its inmost motions. As it consists principally in making SELF our idol, we must watch against it, and labour to bring it into subjection, that God in all things may be glorified by us. If we search our own hearts, we shall see a continual proneness to self-seeking, self-pleasing, and self-dependence. But instead of gratifying this propensity, we should make God’s will the rule, and his honour the end, of our actions. We must therefore maintain a warfare against it, and resist it manfully, till it be subdued.^k]

This however cannot be done effectually but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit

[We can walk after the flesh without any difficulty: it is natural to us, as it is to a stone to run down a precipice. But to mortify the flesh, is impossible to man: it can be effected only by the mighty working of that power, which raised Christ himself from the dead:^j yea, the inclination, as well as the ability, to mortify it is the gift of God.^m This however is no excuse for our subjection to the flesh, since the Holy Spirit shall be given to all that ask it at God’s hands.ⁿ].

The consequence of successfully combating the flesh shall be unspeakably blessed

[If eternal death be the fruit of self-indulgence, eternal life shall be the fruit of self-denial. There is this difference indeed; that whereas the former is the *wages* due to sin, the latter is the *gift* of God through Christ.^o We may well wonder at this marvellous grace of God, who has annexed such glorious consequences to our poor and feeble endeavours. But he delighteth in mercy, and will not suffer us to exert ourselves in vain.]

By way of IMPROVEMENT we shall add a word

1. Of reproof

ⁱ Rom. vii. 24. Col. ii. 11.

^k 1 Cor ix. 27.

^l Eph. i. 19, 20. and 1 Pet. i. 22. with the text. ^m Phil. ii. 13.

ⁿ Luke xi. 13.

^o Rom. vi. 23.

[Suppose it had been written, “If ye live after the flesh, ye shall go to heaven;” could the generality take any surer way to obtain the blessing, than that which they now pursue? And whence is it that, in direct opposition to the word of God, they can go on so confidently and so securely? The reason is, that Satan suggests to them, as he did to our first parents, “Ye shall not surely die.” But shall we believe God or Satan? Did not the crediting of Satan ruin the whole world? and will it not eventually ruin us also? Be it known that we have but this alternative, *mortification*, or *damnation*. Either sin must be our enemy, or God. If therefore we would not perish for ever, let us immediately begin, in dependence on God’s Spirit, to “mortify our earthly members;”^p for it is an eternal truth, that, “if we live after the flesh, we shall die.”]

2. Of caution

[We are in great danger of mistaking the nature and extent of that mortification which is required of us in the text. We may be restrained from sin by the influence of education, as Joash;^q or put away many sins, as Herod;^r or set ourselves for a time against our besetting sin, as Judas under the terrors of a guilty conscience;^s (as a mariner may cast all his goods out of his ship to save the vessel, without any aversion to the goods themselves) or may exchange our sins (prodigality for avarice, sensuality for self-righteousness, or the love of vanity for sloth and indifference.) But all this falls very far short of our duty: we must not be lopping off branches; but must lay our axe to the root. The besetting sin, though dear as a right eye, or needful as a right hand, must be cut off; at least, its dominion must be destroyed, and its motions be incessantly resisted.^t In short, to root out sin, and to serve, honour, and enjoy God, must be our daily business, or uninterrupted employment. Nor must we ever think that we belong to Christ, till we have the testimony of our conscience, that we are thus crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts.^u]

3. Of encouragement

[As we have ruined ourselves, God might well leave us to restore ourselves: and then indeed would our condition be most pitiable. But he graciously offers us the assistance of his Spirit; so that none need despair: none need to decline the work of mortification for want of strength to accomplish it;

^p Col. iii. 5.

^q Mark vi. 17, 20, 27.

^r Mark ix. 43—48.

^q 2 Chron. xxiv. 2.

^s Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.

^u Gal. v. 24.

seeing that “the grace of Christ is sufficient for us,” and through the aids of his Spirit we can do all things:^x yea, “his strength shall be perfected in our weakness.” Let every one then address himself to the work: “Have not I commanded thee? saith the Lord: be strong, therefore, and of a good courage; for the Lord thy God is with thee:^y “Be strong, and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded.”^z]

^x Gal. v. 16. and Phil. iv. 13.

^y Josh. i. 9.

^z 2 Chron. xv. 7.

CCCCII. THE SELF-DECEPTION OF COVETOUS PROFESSORS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. *And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*

NONE can be religious without appearing so; because religion must of necessity regulate our outward conduct—But persons may appear religious, while they are wholly destitute of vital godliness—Such were they, who talked *of*^a the Prophet in their houses, and expressed so much solicitude to hear from him the word of the Lord—

We propose to consider

I. The characters here described

[If we look at their *profession* only, all is well: they unite themselves to the Lord’s people, and account themselves to be of their number—They pay great attention to the ordinances; they feel peculiar delight in the ministration of the word; they express a very high regard for those who labour in the word and doctrine; they are not offended even with the most searching discourses; nor are the sons and daughters of pleasure more gratified with musical entertainments, than they

^a So the word “*against*” should be read in ver. 30. as the whole context evidently shews; and it is so rendered in the margin of the Bibles.

are with the fluent, fervent, eloquent harangues of a faithful minister—

But, alas! their *practice* ill accords with their profession—It is amusement rather than real edification that they seek—Their hearts are set upon the world, and riveted to their earthly possessions—In the pursuit of gain they will be guilty of falsehood and dishonesty; they will commend their goods, when they know them to be bad; they will impose on the ignorance or the necessities of those who deal with them; they will take advantage of the confidence reposed in them to overreach their neighbour; and will condescend to meanness, of which an honest heathen would be ashamed—They may be generous where their own inclination is strongly concerned, or where a liberal donation will advance their reputation; but at other times they will be as penurious and niggardly as the most unfeeling miser—It may be indeed that a principle of honour keeps them tolerably observant of truth and justice; but they give abundant evidence that their hearts are set upon things below rather than on things above, and shew, that they are more solicitous to be rich in this world, than to be rich towards God———

Such there have been in every age; nor are there wanting many such characters among the professors of the present day^b. They hear the duties of a Christian opened and enforced; but they remain as much under the dominion of their lusts as ever———]

II. The light in which they are viewed by God

[*In their own eyes* they are as good as any—Whatever be their besetting sin, they have reasons enough to extenuate and excuse it—Their covetousness is nothing more than prudence and diligence; their fretfulness and fiery passions are the mere infirmities of nature, the trifling ebullitions of a warm and hasty temper, that are far more than counterbalanced by a proportionable zeal for what is good—When they hear the contrary dispositions recommended from the pulpit, they acknowledge the directions to be exceeding proper; but they scarcely ever feel their own conduct condemned by them—They are eagle-eyed in spying out the faults of others; but they are almost utter strangers to their own—Their zeal for the gospel, and their attachment to those who preach or profess it, is to them a decisive evidence of their own conversion; and nothing that God or man can say to the contrary is suffered for one moment to shake their confidence—

^b The characters of a proud and passionate professor, and of a censorious and uncharitable professor, might here be drawn, as being equally common, and equally hateful.

In the estimation of the church these persons often pass for eminent saints—Their faults are not generally known, and the best construction is put upon all they say or do—Godly men are afraid of judging harshly, and have learned to exercise the “ love that hopeth all things,” and that “ covereth a multitude of sins”—Hence they give the right hand of fellowship to those who shew a love to the gospel; and, even when they fear that all is not right, they are content to “ let the tares grow up with the wheat till the harvest, lest through their ignorance they should pluck up the wheat with the tares”

But in the sight of God who searcheth the heart, these men appear in their proper colours—Are they covetous? “ he abhors them”^c—Are they proud, passionate, contentious? they are actuated by an infernal spirit^d—Have they no government of their tongue? their religion is vain^e—Are they hearers of the word, and not doers of it also? They only deceive their own souls^f—Are they habitually and allowedly under the dominion of any sin whatever? they are children of the devil,^g and not of God:^h notwithstanding all their profession, they have no part in the gospel salvation,ⁱ no acceptance in their prayers,^k nor any portion but eternal misery in hell^l—They may have a name to live; but they are really dead before God^m]]

INFER

1. How far must they be from a Christian state, who feel no delight in divine ordinances!

[It has already appeared that men may be extremely fond of the offices, the ministers, and the professors of religion, and yet perish for ever for want of that conformity to the divine will, which is essential to the Christian character—How much more then must they be destitute of religion, who have not even the outward appearance of sanctity, but live in an open contempt of God’s word and ordinances!—Let not any one imagine that the naming the name of Christ is sufficient to constitute us Christians—The tree must be judged of by its fruits: and according to our works will be the sentence that shall be passed upon us in the last day—]

2. What need have the professors of religion to examine well their own hearts!

[Love to the word and people of God, if accompanied with an unreserved obedience to his commandments, is an excellent evidence of our conversion: but, if there be a reign-

^c Ps. x. 3.

^d Jam. iii. 14, 15.

^e Jam. i. 26.

^h Ib. ver. 9.

^g 1 John iii. 8.

^b Ps. lxvi. 18.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 6. and Rom. vi. 14.

Mark ix. 43—48.

^m Rev. iii. 1.

ing inconsistency in our conduct, our love to the one or to the other of these is mere hypocrisyⁿ—Let us then enquire diligently, and beg of God to try us, whether there be any wickedness practised in our lives, or harboured in our bosoms:^o—Let us not be content to “honour God with our lips while our hearts are far from him”—Let us rather intreat him to “put truth in our inward parts,” that, while we profess to be interested in the promises, we may “purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God”^p—]

ⁿ Matt. xv. 7, 8. Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. Isaiah lviii. 2, 3.

^o Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. ^p 1 Cor. vii. 1.

CCCCIII. THE CONSEQUENCE OF SLOTH.

Prov. xx. 4. *The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.*

ARGUMENTS from analogy, when the analogy itself is just, are easy of apprehension, and well calculated to convince the mind: and one distinguished excellence of the book of Proverbs is, that it abounds with such arguments; and without any formal statement of premises and conclusions, presents the truth to us in short, sententious aphorisms, that are plain, obvious, incontrovertible. Whoever has made the least observation on human affairs, must have seen the evil consequences of neglecting our proper business in life, whether in husbandry, or trade, or any other line: and it is easy to infer from thence, that, similar consequences must attend a neglect of our Christian duties. Nor is it necessary that this analogy should be always pointed out to us: the whole scope of that divinely inspired book naturally leads us to make a spiritual improvement of the hints, which, in their literal sense, apply only to the things of this life.

Let us then in this view consider

I. The sluggard's conduct

The duties both of the husbandman and the Christian require industry

[It was a part of the curse introduced by sin, that man should obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow: nor will the

earth yield us any thing but briers and thorns, unless we bestow much pains in the cultivation of it. Our attention to it must be unremitting: it is not the labour of a month or a year that will suffice: we must repeat again and again the same processes, in order to guard against the noxious weeds that would overrun it, and cherish the good seed, which we want it to produce. Thus also must the Christian exert himself in order to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. His heart is prolific in what is evil, but barren in what is good: he must therefore daily counteract its natural propensities, and foster the holy desires that have been sown in it. The same work of repentance and faith must be continually renewed, till the Lord himself shall come to gather in his harvest.]

Yet are we ever ready to neglect our work on frivolous pretences

[A regard to temporal interest will often overcome men's natural sloth, and excite them to diligence in their several vocations. Yet are there many instances, where the indulgence of sloth makes men blind to their own happiness, and deaf to the cries of their distressed families. With respect to spiritual concerns, an indisposition to labour universally prevails. The work of the soul is irksome and difficult; and every one either deems it altogether unnecessary, or desires to defer it as long as possible. But it is observable that the sluggard does not absolutely say, "I hate my work, and therefore will not do it," much less does he say, "I am determined never to plow at all;" but he finds some excuse for neglecting what he is averse to perform; and fixes on some plea, which, *in certain circumstances*, and *to a certain extent*, might be sufficient. Thus the Christian does not say, "I hate repentance and faith in Christ; much less does he resolve never to repent and believe: but he always has some reason at hand for deferring this unpleasant work, and promises himself a more convenient season, before the time for plowing be entirely passed away. He has the cares of a family, or a pressure of business, or something that serves him for an excuse: but, upon examination, it will either be found a mere excuse, or a reason, on which he lays a very improper stress; making use of it to justify a total and habitual neglect, when, at the most, it would only account for a partial and occasional omission. But as an husbandman who should yield to such a disposition, is denominated by God himself, "a sluggard," so we are sure, that he, who on such frivolous pretexts intermits his Christian duties, will receive no better appellation at the day of judgment than that of a "wicked and slothful servant."]

But in whomsoever such conduct is found, he will at last have reason to deplore

II. The consequences of it

As industry and wealth, so idleness and want are very closely connected

[Circumstances occur in this world to interrupt the natural operation of causes and effects: but *in general*, where any man's subsistence depends upon his labour, the consequences of sloth or activity will be such as might be expected. In spiritual things the rule is absolute and invariable. Every man's progress will be according to his labour. Some indeed may enjoy more of comfort than others, from other causes than their own diligence: but every person's real proficiency in grace will be proportioned to the improvement he makes of the talents committed to him: without detracting at all from the grace of God, we may safely affirm, that the difference between one Christian and another in respect of victory over sin, and happiness in the divine life, must be traced in a very great measure to their different degrees of watchfulness in secret duties.]

This truth however will not appear in its full extent till the day of judgment

[At the time of harvest the care or negligence of the husbandman will very clearly appear: and, if we should suppose a man to have wholly neglected the cultivation of his fields, he would find himself destitute, while others were satiated with abundance; nor, if he were reduced to beggary, would he find any one to pity his forlorn condition. But his situation, deplorable as it would be, is not to be compared with that of a negligent Christian in the day of judgment. *He* will see others reaping a glorious harvest, while he is not permitted even to glean an ear: he will behold others "crowned with glory and honour and immortality," while nothing remains for him but "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." The foolish virgins, who slept while they should have been procuring oil for their lamps, came and pleaded in vain for admittance, when the door was once shut against them: none but the wise virgins were suffered to participate the nuptial feast. In the same manner, the rich man, who lived only to the flesh, sought in vain for one drop of water to mitigate his anguish, while Lazarus, who had lived to nobler purposes, had a fulness of joy in Abraham's bosom. Thus also will it be with all, when the great harvest shall arrive: they, who had improved their season of grace, will be partakers of glory; while they, who had wasted it in sloth and self-indulgence, will reap the fruits of their folly, in deserved shame, in perpetual want, in unalleviated, unpitied, everlasting misery.]

APPLICATION

1. Let us, in the view of this subject, take shame to ourselves

[How long has our season of grace been protracted; and what little improvement have we made of it! How apt are we to yield to sloth, and to defer the most important of all duties on slight and frivolous pretences, which we know beforehand will never satisfy our Judge! But what can ever equal this folly? A sluggard in temporal things may find some one to pity his distress; and may learn from his experience to amend. But who will ever pity the self-ruined sinner? Or what further opportunity for amendment will be afforded him? Let us then begin, and prosecute without remission, the work of our souls. Let us "plow up the fallow ground, and sow in righteousness," knowing assuredly, that "the diligent hand shall make us rich," and that, "if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy."]

2. Let us look forward with earnestness to the future harvest

[The husbandman waits with patience, in expectation that the harvest will compensate his labours. And will not our harvest repay all the exertions we can use, and all the self-denial we can exercise? Let us then put forth all the energies of our souls in preparing for that day. Let us not suffer any difficulties or discouragements to abate our ardour; but, "whatever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might," "and so much the more as we see the day approaching."]

CCCCIV. THE SINFULNESS OF MURMURING AGAINST GOD.

Prov. xix. 3. *The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

THE wickedness of the heart is deep and unsearchable—

They who do not watch its motions, have no idea of its depravity—

But they who diligently examine it may discover many evils—

And by the light of God's word attain considerable knowledge—

The disposition mentioned in the text deserves special attention

I. Illustrate the disposition here spoken of

The careless and ungodly world are ever ready to cast blame on God

1. On account of their sins

[They give the rein to every evil thought and desire—
expose themselves to every kind of temptation—
lay innumerable stumbling-blocks in their own way—

And thus become enslaved by vicious lusts and appetites—
Against these iniquities God denounces his judgment—
But the slaves of sin continue hardened in their evil ways—
They condemn even God himself as the author of their sins—

This was the conduct of Adam immediately after the fall^a—
And it is too often imitated by his guilty descendants—]

2. On account of their sorrows

[Sorrow is entailed on all as the punishment of the first transgression—

But most of the afflictions which men suffer are brought on them by their own folly—

Some involve themselves in distress through sloth or intemperance—

Others ruin themselves by imprudence and extravagance—
But all under their calamities “fret against the Lord”—
They are full of invectives against those that have been the more immediate occasions of their trouble^b—

They consider their lot as hard and severe—

And thus do they reflect on Providence rather than on themselves—

Cain, the first-born of Adam, indulged this malignant spirit^c—
Nor are there any sons of sorrow who do not follow his example—]

Nor are believers themselves wholly free from this disposition

[They watch and pray against their besetting sin—
Yet are sometimes brought under the power of it—
On these occasions they are tempted to fret against the Lord—

They are ready to expostulate with him like those of old^d—

^a Gen. iii. 12. He obliquely condemns God for giving the woman to him.

^b Numb. xvi. 11, 41.

^c Gen. iv. 13, 14.

^d Isaiah Iviii. 3.

They forget how justly they might have been eternally forsaken—

And that the remaining power of their sins is the consequence both of former habits, and of present neglects—

Under afflictions also they feel too much proneness to murmur—

What sinful impatience did the holy Elijah manifest!^e—

Even Job himself preserved not wholly a becoming temper^f]—

This disposition however is most hateful in the sight of God

II. The evil of it

It betrays the most *deplorable ignorance*

[God is not, nor can be, the author of sin—

He maintains in all things the character given of him^g—

Hence St. James shews the folly of casting blame on God^h—

Nor can God punish any of us more than our iniquities deserve—

Hence the expostulation of the prophet is unanswerableⁱ—

Besides, to fret against God is not the way to interest him in our behalf—

Nor will it tend to the peace and composure of our own spirits—

It is as unprofitable to us as it is unjust towards him—

True wisdom would teach us to humble ourselves in his presence—

And to renew our supplications with greater earnestness—

This conduct is as sure to succeed, as the other is to fail of success^k]—

It manifests the most *obstinate impenitence*

[Both sins and sorrows ought to produce humility—

When they increase our rebellion, our state is almost desperate—

How awfully does such a temper characterize God's enemies!^m—

And make us resemble those that are consigned over to perdition!ⁿ—

Surely nothing more heinous can be laid to our charge—

Nor any thing more speedily fit us for destruction—]

It evinces the most *consummate arrogance*

[To fret and murmur is, in fact, to reprove God—

^e 1 Kings xix. 4.

^f Job vii. 15, 16.

^g Deut. xxxii. 4.

^h James i. 13, 14.

ⁱ Lam. iii. 39.

^k Prov. xxviii. 13.

^l Isaiah i. 5.

^m Rev. xvi. 9.

ⁿ Matt. viii. 12.

God himself considers it as a direct attack upon him^o—
And can any thing be more presumptuous in such worms as we?—

St. Paul reprobates this impiety with holy indignation^p—
And every one who allows himself in it, must answer it at his peril—]

We conclude with suitable ADVICE

1. Let us search into the occasions of our sins and sorrows

[We may be surprised into sin by a sudden temptation—
But may trace our fall to preceding unwatchfulness—
Nor can we expect God to keep us, if we neglect to keep ourselves—

We are rarely earnest enough in using the means of safety—
We are too backward to meditation, prayer, and fasting—
Our afflictions also may have come without any misconduct on our part—

But who has not merited them by his sins?—
Men should only be considered as instruments in God's hands^q—

And the consideration of his will should silence every murmur^r—]

2. Let us always be careful to justify God

[We may not always be able to account for his dispensations—

But we should not on that account doubt the equity of them—
Whatever we suffer, we should not “charge God foolishly”—

Under the darkest dispensations we should say as the Psalmist^s—

If we wait we shall see the wisdom of many things which now seem utterly inexplicable—

We may rest assured that David's assertion shall be verified—]

3. Let us see what improvement may be made of our troubles

[There is no rod which has not a voice to us—
Our very sins may be permitted, in order to humble us—
And to make us more thankfully cleave to the Saviour—
Our trials, of whatever kind, are to purge away our dross—
And to fit us for our eternal rest—
To view them in this light will greatly compose our minds—
Instead of fretting against the Lord, we shall be thankful to him—

And instead of increasing our misery, we shall make it a mean of joy—]

^o Mal. iii. 13, 14.

^p Rom. ix. 20.

^q Ps. xvii. 13, 14.

^r 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

^s Ps. xxii. 2, 3.

^t Ps. li. 4.

CCCCV. A WORD IN SEASON.

Isaiah I. 10, 11. *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of my hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

OUR blessed Lord was thoroughly furnished for the great work he had undertaken: he had “the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season” to every character. In the days of his flesh he encouraged the weary and heavy-laden with most affectionate invitations: but against the proud and persecuting Pharisees he denounced the heaviest woes. Thus also he did in the passage before us. It is in his name that the Prophet speaks: it was he “who gave his back to the smiters,” and encountered all his enemies with a full assurance of final success: and he it is who, in the text, proclaims

I. Comfort to the desponding

There are some of God’s people, who, notwithstanding their integrity, walk in a disconsolate and desponding frame

[For the most part, the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness and peace; though there may be found some exceptions to this general rule—Not but that *real* and *unmixt* religion must of necessity make men happy: but there are some, whose views of divine truth are clouded, whose souls are harassed with the temptations of Satan, and who are at the same time too much under the influence of unbelief, who are not happy; notwithstanding they truly “fear God, and conscientiously obey his voice, they are in darkness and have no light;” at least, their hope is so faint and glimmering, that it scarcely affords them any support at all—If we were not able to assign any reason for the divine conduct in this particular, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that God never suffers his people to be “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” except when he sees some peculiar “necessity” for such a dispensation towards them^a]—]

But to them is directed the most encouraging advice

[Let not such persons say, "The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten me;"^b let them not conclude, that because their hemisphere is dark, it shall never be light; (for "light is sown for the righteous,"^c though it may not instantly spring up) but "let them trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon their God"—The name of the Lord is a strong tower, whither they may run, and in which they may find safety^d—In the most distressing circumstances let them "encourage themselves in the Lord their God;"^e and if he appear to frown, still let them say with Job, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him'^f—And whenever disquieting thoughts arise, let them chide their unbelief, as David did;^g and determine, if they perish, to perish at the foot of the cross, pleading for mercy in the name of Jesus—]

To persons, however, of a different description the Lord changes his voice; and speaks

II. Terror to the secure

While some are disquieted without a cause, there are others causelessly secure

[To "kindle a fire and compass ourselves with its sparks" seems a natural and obvious expression for seeking our own ease and pleasure: and this may be done, either by self-pleasing endeavours to "establish a righteousness of our own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God;" or by giving up ourselves to worldly occupations and carnal enjoyments—Now they, who find all their satisfaction in one or other of these ways, are very numerous: while they who serve God in sincerity, but walk in darkness, are comparatively very few:^h and so persuaded are they, for the most part, of the happy issue of their conduct, that they will scarcely listen to any thing which may be spoken to undeceive them—But, how numerous or confident soever they may be, their state is widely different from what they apprehend—]

To them God addresses a most solemn warning

[Sometimes, when the obstinacy of men renders them almost incorrigible, God speaks to them in a way of irony—*Here* he bids them go on in their own way, and get all the comfort they can; but warns them withal what doom they must assuredly expect at his hands—Precisely similar to this is his

^b Isai. xlix. 14.

^c Ps. xcvi. 11.

^d Prov. xviii. 10.

^e 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

^f Job xiii. 15.

^g Ps. xlvi. 11.

^h This is strongly intimated in the text, "Who is, &c.? Behold, all ye, &c."

warning to the same description of persons in the book of Ecclesiastes!—And how awfully is it often realized in a dying hour! When they are lying on a bed of “sickness, how much wrath and sorrow” are mixed in their cup!^k And, the very instant they depart out of the body, what “tribulation and anguish” seize hold upon them! Alas! who can conceive what it is to lie down in everlasting burnings? Yet thus shall their lamp be extinguished; and their sparks of created comfort be succeeded by a fire that shall never be quenched!—]

We cannot CONCLUDE this subject better than by directing the attention of all to two important truths connected with it

1. To believe God's word is our truest *wisdom*

[What advice can be given to a disconsolate soul better than that administered in the text? We may “offer thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil; yea, we may give our first-born for our transgression, the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul;” but we can never attain comfort in any other way than by an humble trust in the promises of God: we must, “even against hope, believe in hope;”^m our “joy and peace must come by believing”—Nor is there less folly in arguing against the threatenings of God, than in questioning his promises—If God say respecting those who rest in self-righteous observances, or carnal enjoyments, that they shall lie down in sorrow, our disbelief of it will not make void his word: it will come to pass, even if the whole creation should unite to oppose it—Though men therefore may account it folly to believe the word of God, let us remember, that it is our truest wisdom; and that, without an humble alliance in it, we cannot be happy either in time or eternity—]

2. To obey God's word is our truest *happiness*

[We cannot have a more unfavourable picture of religion, nor a more favourable view of a carnal state, than in the text: yet who would hesitate which state to prefer? Who would not rather be “altogether such as Paul,” notwithstanding his chain, than be like Festus or Agrippa on their thrones?ⁿ Who would not rather be in the destitute condition of Lazarus, and attain to end, than live as Dives for a little time, and then want a drop of water to cool his tongue?^o—Yes, the most afflictive circumstances of a religious man are infinitely preferable, *all things considered*, to the most prosperous state which an ungodly man can enjoy: the one sows in tears to reap in joy; and the other sows the wind to reap the whirlwind!—

ⁱ Eccl. xi. 9.

^k Eccl. v. 17.

^l Job xviii. 5, 6.

^m Rom. iv. 18.

ⁿ Acts xvi. 29.

^o Luke xvi. 19—24

^p Hos. viii. 7.

Let us then be persuaded that to serve God is to consult our truest happiness, and that in keeping his commandments there is great reward^a—]

^a Ps. xix. 11.

CCCCVI. THE FOLLY OF CREATURE-CONFIDENCE,

Hos. v. 13. *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound.*

MEN continually provoke God to chastise them, but rarely make a due improvement of his chastisements. Instead of turning to God, they dishonour him more by applying to the creature under their distress rather than to him. The ten tribes, when punished for their willing compliance with Jeroboam's edicts,^a sought repeatedly to the Assyrians for help instead of humbling themselves before God: but they found, as "Judah" also did on similar occasions, that their confidence in the creature served only to involve them in shame and disappointment.

Taking the text simply as an historical fact, we deduce from it two observations, which deserve our consideration,

I. Men, in times of trouble, are prone to look to the creature for help, rather than to God

This was one of the most common and heinous sins of the Jewish nation:^b and it is universal also amongst ourselves

^a Ver. 11, 12. God consumed them as moth does a garment, or as rottenness the bones, secretly, slowly, gradually, effectually.

^b Sometimes they relied on Egypt; Isaiah xxx. 1—3. and xxxi. 1. Sometimes on Assyria (as Manahem did on Paul, 2 Kings xv. 19. and Ahaz did on Tiglath pilneser, 2 Kings xvi. 7.) and sometimes on themselves, Isaiah xxii. 8—11. "Jareb" here certainly means the king of Assyria: but whether it was his proper name, or a name given him by the prophet, is uncertain. It means *Defender*, and might be applied to him in a taunting manner. In this view it would be a very severe sarcasm. See 2 Chron. xxviii. 20.

1. In troubles of a temporal nature

[In sickness of body, we lean, like Asa,^c on the physician. In distress of mind, we complain and murmur; but forget to pray.^d In straitened circumstances, we expect relief from friends, or our own exertions. God is invariably our last refuge.]

2. In spiritual troubles

[Under conviction of sin, we betake ourselves to the observance of duties, and make resolutions to amend our lives, instead of fleeing to Christ as the refuge of lost sinners.^e In seasons also of temptation, or desertion, we adopt a thousand expedients to remove our burthens, but will not cast them on the Lord.^f Though foiled ten thousand times, we cannot bring ourselves to lie as clay in the potter's hands; but will rest in the means, instead of looking simply to God in the use of means.]

But the longer we persist in it the more we shall find, that

II. The creature cannot afford us any affectual succour

There are circumstances indeed wherein friends may be instrumental to our relief: but they can do

1. Nothing effectual

[The consolations which are administered by man, or by the vanities of this world, are poor empty, transient.^g Not the whole universe combined can ever bring a man to "glory in tribulations,"^h and to say with Paul, "I take pleasure in them for the sake of Christ:"ⁱ as soon might they enable him to stop the sun in its course, as to reduce to experience the paradoxes of that holy apostle.^k]

2. Nothing of themselves

[It is not a little humiliating to see how weak are man's endeavours to heal either the disorders of the body, or the troubles of the soul, when God is pleased to withhold his blessing. The best prescriptions, or the wisest counsels, are even lighter than vanity itself. Reasonings, however just and scriptural, have no weight: advice, however sweetened with love and sympathy, is rejected: the very grounds of consolation are turned into occasions of despair.^l When God says, "Let there be light," there is light: but till then, the soul is shut up in impenetrable darkness.^m]

^c 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

^d Gen. iv. 13, 14.

^e Isaiah lv. 2.

^f 1 Sam. xvi. 14—16.

^g Jer. ii. 13.

^h Rom. v. 3.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^k 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^l Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3.

^m Job xxxiv. 29.

ADDRESS

1. Let us guard against this sinful propensity, both in our national and personal concerns

[We cannot but see how prone we are, as a nation, to rest on human alliances, and human efforts. Would to God we could correct this fatal error, and trust more entirely in the great disposer of all events!]

As individuals at least we may, and must, correct it. If we would have the blessing of God, and not his curse, we must renounce all creature-confidence, and trust in him alone.ⁿ]

2. Let us especially rely on Christ as the healer of our souls

[He is “the healer of the nations,”^o “Jehovah, who healeth us;”^p there is no physician besides him; nor any balm, but his blood. We may use whatever means we will, either to pacify our conscience, or to purify the heart; but we shall find that they can “not heal us, nor cure us of our wound.” But Christ is all-sufficient: he can in one moment purge us by his blood, and renovate us by his Spirit. To him then let us look with humble, uniform, unshaken affiance.]

ⁿ Jer. xvii. 5—8. See David’s example, Ps. lx. 11. and cxxi. 1, 2.

^o Rev. xxii. 2.

^p Exod. x. 26.

CCCCVII. THE DANGER OF PRIDE.

Hos. v. 5. *The pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore Israel and Ephraim shall fall in their iniquity; Judah also shall fall with them.*

ALL profess to hate pride—Yet all are more or less infected with it—The very best of men are not wholly free from its influence—But, in the unregenerate, it is the governing principle of all their actions—It was one of the most distinguishing features in the character of Sodom^a—The professing people of God also were led captive by it—And were brought thereby under his just and heavy displeasure—We shall make some observations upon

^a Ezek. xvi. 49.

I. The sin of Israel

The state of Israel was not peculiar to that nation—Human nature is in all ages the same—Nor does pride manifest itself more strongly any where than amongst ourselves—Behold

1. The careless sinner

[What determined opposition is there in the hearts of many to the authority of God!—They will not submit to his light and easy yoke—If required to obey, they object to the command itself as severe and impracticable—If warned of the consequences of their disobedience, they make light of all God's threatenings—If urged to receive the gospel salvation, they deride it as foolishness^b—The language of their heart is, Who is Lord over us? we know not the Lord; neither will we obey his voice^c—That this proceeds from pride, there can be no doubt—God himself traces such conduct to *this*, as its proper source and principle^d—And doth not this “testify to the face” of many amongst us? Is not this the conduct which almost universally obtains?—Yea, are not *we* sensible that it too justly describes either our present or our former state?—]

2. The self-righteous formalist

[Persons of this description have kept themselves free from gross enormities—Or perhaps have reformed their conduct after having given the rein to all their appetites—But their pride rises in proportion to their fancied attainments—They look with contempt on others who are openly immoral^e—And bless themselves that they are not as other men^f—Meanwhile “they feel not the plague of their own heart”—They deny the representation which the scripture gives of their fallen state^g—They cannot endure to think themselves deserving of God's wrath—Nor will they submit to be saved by the righteousness of God^h—And whence does all this originate?—Surely pride and self-exaltation are properly pointed out as the spring from whence it flowsⁱ—Yet doth not this disposition also lamentably prevail?—Doth it not testify to the face of some whom we are now addressing?—Are there not some amongst ourselves who trust in their own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, instead of fleeing to Christ as blind, helpless, hopeless creatures?—Some, who are too proud to accept salvation on the footing of publicans and harlots?—Yea, some, who will rather perish in their sins, than seek to have them purged away in the Redeemer's blood?]

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^c Ps. xii. 4. Exod. v. 2.

^d Ps. x. 4, 5.

^e Isaiah lxv. 5.

^f Luke xviii. 9, 11.

^g Rev. iii. 17.

^h Rom. x. 3.

ⁱ Luke xviii. 14.

3. The hypocritical professor

[None are more puffed up with pride than some who would be thought followers of the lowly Jesus—They are conceited of their knowledge—And will bear with none who do not pronounce their shibboleth—They profess indeed to believe that their hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked—Yet they will never listen to instruction or reproof—Nor can they be persuaded to deny their own will in any thing for the good of others—None are more ready than these to set up themselves in opposition to all constituted authorities—St. Jude speaks of them as “murmurers and complainers,” as “despising dominion and speaking evil of dignities”^k—Nor are there any people under heaven to whom Solomon’s description of the proud man may be more fitly applied^l—Alas! does not the Spirit also testify to the face of many?—Never was there a period when it prevailed in so great a degree—Surely it may well be numbered among the most heinous sins of this nation—]

Having followed the sins of Israel, what can we expect but to participate in

II. The judgment denounced against them

To “fall” must certainly import some heavy judgment—This threatening was not fully accomplished but in the utter destruction of the Jewish nation—Nor can we hope to escape the displeasure of God while we harbour in our hearts an evil that is so offensive to him—

The proud will most generally fall *in this world*

[In their own conceit their mountain stands so strong as to bid defiance to every assault—They think that they shall never be moved^m—But how irresistibly have the haughtiest monarchs been hurled from their throne!ⁿ—How speedily have the most powerful empires been brought to desolation!^o—How instantaneously have God’s judgments often marked the heinousness of this sin!^p—If they be exalted for a time they are almost invariably brought low at last^q]—

They are absolutely certain to fall *in the eternal world*

[If indeed they repented of their sin, they would find mercy with God—A broken and contrite heart he will never despise—Though he will resist the proud, yet he will give

^k Ver. 8, 16.

^l Prov. xxx. 12, 13.

^m Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

ⁿ Dan. v. 20, 23.

^o Ezek. xxviii. 2, 6, 8. Isaiah xiv. 12—15.

^p 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. Acts xii. 23.

^q Ps. lxxiii. 6, 9, 18, 20.

^r Ps. li. 17.

grace unto the humble—He will look on *him* with pleasure and complacency^s—But nothing can ever reconcile him to “a man that walketh in pride”—He will surely abase the proud^t—He has irreversibly decreed their utter destruction^u—Nor shall the whole universe combined prevent the execution of his vengeance on one single individual amongst them^v]—

The observance of ceremonial duties will never compensate for the want of true humility

[Judah retained the forms of religion which Israel and Ephraim had cast away—Yet because Judah resembled Israel in their sin, they were to be involved in Israel’s calamity—Thus must all, however zealous and exemplary in other respects, be brought down and confounded before God^z—Even a preacher of righteousness, if lifted up with pride, shall fall into the condemnation of the devil^a—The rule laid down by God himself shall surely be observed to all eternity^b]—

INFER

1. How excellent is the gospel of Christ!

[Nothing but the gospel ever did, or ever can, humble the soul—The law may terrify; but it is the gospel alone that melts us into contrition—That no sooner reaches the heart, than it brings down our high looks—It turned, in an instant, thousands of bloodthirsty murderers into meek, loving, and obedient followers of the Lamb^c—And thus does it still operate on all who receive it in sincerity^d—Let us then listen to it with delight—Let us pray, that a sight of the crucified Saviour may produce its due effect upon us^e—And let us loath ourselves the more in proportion as we are perswaded that God is pacified towards us^f]—

2. What need have we all to watch and pray!

[There are none who are out of the reach of this malignant principle—St. Paul, after having been caught up to the third heavens, was in danger of being overwhelmed by it^g—And who amongst us does not find that it is ready to puff us up on every occasion?—Let us remember that this ruined the very angels in heaven—And that it must be mortified in us, if ever we would obtain mercy in the last day—Let us guard against the first risings of it in the heart—And, whenever it testifies to our face, let us implore mercy of the Lord, that the thought of our hearts may be forgiven us^h—In this way we shall be preserved, though in the midst of danger—And be exalted in due time to glory and honour, and immortality]—

^s Isaiah lvii. 15.

^t Dan. iv. 37.

^u Mal. iv. 1.

^x Prov. xvi. 5.

^y The text.

^z Isaiah ii. 11, 12.

^a 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^b Luke xviii. 14.

^c Acts ii. 37, 41, 42.

^d Acts ix. 6, and xvi. 29, 33.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^h Zech. xii. 10.

^e Ezek. xvi. 63.

^f 2 Cor. vii. 23.

ⁱ Acts vii. 23.

CCCCVIII. AGAINST PRIDE AND SECURITY.

Rom. xi. 20: *Be not high-minded, but fear.*

THE deep mysteries of our religion are calculated at once to encourage sinners, and to humble saints. The sovereignty of God is a great depth; and it was awfully displayed in the rejection of the Jews, and the admission of the Gentiles into his church. This is the subject of which the Apostle speaks in the whole context: and he makes use of it as the means of provoking to emulation the Jews themselves, and at the same time of guarding the believing Gentiles against self-preference, and self-security.

In considering his exhortation, we shall
I: Explain its import

The former part of it contains a dissuasive from pride

[The proper tendency of religion is to produce humility: but, through the corruption of our nature, pride will take occasion even from the grace of God itself, to rise in our hearts. What self-complacency will sometimes arise from a consciousness of our superior attainments in truth and holiness! What acrimonious severity towards those, who dishonour their profession! And what contemptuous disregard of those who are yet immersed in ignorance and sin! Together with this self-preference, we are also too apt to indulge a secure and self-depending spirit, and to think "our mountain so strong, that we can never be moved."^a But as the former disposition is most hateful to God,^b so the latter also is an object of his utter abhorrence.^c In both these views therefore it becomes every believer to attend to the Apostle's advice, and, instead of entertaining too high an opinion of his own wisdom, strength, or goodness, to "think soberly."^d]

In the latter part the Apostle recommends humility and watchfulness

[By "fear," we are not to understand a slavish dread of God's wrath; for that, so far from being opposite to pride, is in many cases the offspring of it. That which is here recommended is, a holy jealousy over ourselves, lest by any means we be tempted to walk unworthy of our high privileges, and thereby provoke God to deprive us of them. We are in the

^a Ps. xxx. 7.

^b Isaiah lxv. 5.

^c Jer. xvii. 5. Prov. xxviii. 26.

^d Rom. xii. 3.

midst of an ensnaring world, beset with many and subtle adversaries, and ready to be beguiled by a treacherous and deceitful heart. Hence, like St. Paul himself,^e we are necessitated to use the utmost circumspection, diligence, and self-denial, lest, after all our exertions, our labour prove in vain.]

To shew the importance of this exhortation, we shall

II. Point out the reasons of it

Many reasons might be assigned: but we shall content ourselves with noticing three:

1. We have no stability in ourselves

[As all our ability and inclination to what is good, are derived from God at first, so must we receive continual supplies from him, even as of light from the sun. Without his constant superintendence, both the visible world, and the new creation in the soul of man, would soon revert to their original chaos. This the Apostle elsewhere urges as a motive to diligence,^f and, in the words before us, to humility and care. Nor can we well have a more powerful argument; for if "we stand by faith" only, and not by any wisdom or strength of our own, it becomes us to maintain a spirit suited to our weak and dependent state.]

2. Others, apparently as safe as we, have been rejected

[Many have long made a profession of religion, and departed from it at last.^g Demas stands as an awful monument of human weakness.^h Lot's wife is pointed out to us in the same view.ⁱ The Jews, who were brought out of Egypt, and yet were destroyed in the wilderness, are expressly set forth as examples to us.^k And, above all, the rejection of the Jewish nation for their iniquities, after they had been so long the peculiar people of God, speaks loudly to us. This in particular is urged by the Apostle in the words following the text;^l and it teaches us, never so to value ourselves either on our relation to God, or our experience of his goodness, as to forget, that we also may be rejected, if we do not rely upon him, and unreservedly devote ourselves to him.]

3. That which was the ground of the rejection of the Jews, is very prevalent in us

[God had given to the Jews a revelation respecting the Messiah: but they disbelieved his record, and rejected his Son: and for this their unbelief they were "broken off from the olive" which God's right hand had planted. A still clearer

^e 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^f Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^g 1 Tim. i. 19.

^h 2 Tim. iv. 10.

ⁱ Luke xvii. 32.

^j Jude 3. 1 Cor. x. 11. See also Jer. vii. 12. ^l Ver. 21, 22.

revelation God has given unto us: and is there not much unbelief in our hearts with respect to it? Are even the most advanced Christians so much affected with the declarations of God's word, as they would be, if faith were in constant and perfect exercise? Alas! the faith that realizes things invisible, and gives a present existence to things future,^m is found in but few, and operates but weakly in the best: and, if it should wholly fail, Satan would sift us as wheat, and we should be found chaff at last.ⁿ When therefore we consider how weak our faith is, and that it is "by faith we stand," we have reason to fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it.^o]

We shall conclude the subject with some suitable A.D.VICE

1. Bear in mind what you once were

[To "look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit, whence we were digged," will be a good antidote to pride. While we remember what we were, we shall see no reason but for humiliation and thankfulness before him, who has made us to differ both from others, and from our former selves.^p]

2. Consider what you still are

[You are, we trust, "brands plucked out of the fire;" true; but you still bear the marks of the fire upon you; and have a disposition to catch fire again, the very instant you are exposed to temptation. Let every one view himself in this light; and he will see need enough of attending to the exhortation in the text.]

3. Be aware of the deceitfulness of your own hearts

[In ten thousand instances we must have seen how liable we are to err even in things wherein we are most confident. So blinded are we at times by pride, passion, or interest, that we think ourselves right, when others evidently perceive, that we know not what spirit we are of. Let us be aware of this tendency to deceive ourselves; and beg of God both to search our hearts, and to guide our feet.]

4. Guard against temptations to sin

[Many are the temptations that assault us from without. From these we should flee, shunning both the occasions and the very appearance of evil. Many also are our temptations from within. These we should resist in their very first rise. We may easily extinguish a fire at its commencement, when all our efforts may be baffled, if we suffer it to proceed. For

^m Heb. xi. 1.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 31.

^o Heb. iv. 1.

^p Tit. iii. 3—6. 1 Cor. iv. 7.

all is that direction necessary, “ Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.”]

5. Live wholly in dependence on the power and grace of Christ

[Without this, all our other efforts will be fruitless. All “our fresh springs are in Christ,” “without whom we can do nothing.” “ Except he keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain.” Let us then “ be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” Then, though weak, “ we shall be able to do all things;” and, though fiercely assaulted, we shall be “ more than conquerors.”]

CCCCIX. THE DANGER OF FALSE CONFIDENCE.

Hos. viii. 2, 3. Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.

THERE is not a more intimate connexion between any two things than between sin and misery. However specious an appearance any hypocrite may make in the world, God, who sees his heart, will sooner or later detect and punish his hypocrisy. The Israelites on different occasions professed to repent, and to return to God: but they were “as a deceitful bow,” that effected not the purpose for which they seemed to be bent: on which account God commanded the Prophet to “set the trumpet to his mouth,” and to proclaim their *speedy* destruction. The Prophet’s testimony is then confirmed by God himself in the words before us: in which we may see

I. What confidence is often possessed by hypocrites

[Those who are far from being upright before God, have often a strong confidence respecting their acceptance with him: they will claim God as *their* God: they will say to him, “ We know thee;” exactly as if they were living in the most intimate habits of communion with him. Such were the Jews in the wilderness,^a and such the Pharisees in our Lord’s time:^b and such perhaps are some amongst ourselves.

But their confidence differs widely from that of the sincere: theirs for the most part is a bold, presumptuous persuasion, that

^a Ps. lxxviii. 35—37.

^b John viii. 33, 39, 41, 42.

will admit no doubt at all: while that of the godly is accompanied with a holy fear and jealousy, lest they should deceive themselves: theirs is founded on God's decrees, together with their own *past* experience; while that of the godly rather rests on the general promises which are made to sinners, and on the *present* conformity of their state to the mind and will of God.

Generally speaking too, the confidence of hypocrites is less subject to fluctuation than that of the sincere, because Satan will do all he can to cherish the one, while he exerts himself to the utmost to weaken and destroy the other.]

But however strong men's professions may be, we see in the text

II. What notice God takes of their hypocrisy

[Those who are "hypocrites in heart" may yet under certain circumstances make a fair profession of religion: they may far outstrip the sincere, so as to become objects of envy and admiration to them. The very confidence which they possess is calculated to bear them up, and to make them "ride, as it were, on the high places of the earth;" while the more timid are slowly walking in the valley of humility. But that which is the cause of their progress, is also the occasion of their decline; just as our Lord himself describes it in the case of the stony-ground hearers.^e

After the first impulse of novelty has ceased to operate, they begin to decline: like a bowl cast out of the hand with force, they proceed in a right direction for a little time, but soon yielding to the inward bias of their nature, they depart from the line of duty, till they finally rest at a distance from God. Sometimes their declension is only secret; they retain the form of godliness without its power: sometimes it is open, and they "cast off" with contempt the principles and conduct which they once professed to venerate.

But whether their departure be open or secret, God infallibly discerns it, and marks their hypocrisy under its most specious guise.]

Amidst their security, the text informs us

III. What awful danger awaits them

[God forewarned the hypocritical Israelites that the Assyrians should "pursue them," and "avenge the quarrel of his covenant." And wherever men deal deceitfully with him, they shall assuredly be pursued and overtaken by the wrath of God. This is repeatedly and strongly affirmed in the holy

^e "The seed sprang up forthwith, because it had no deepness of earth;" and it was soon scorched and destroyed from the very same reason. Matt. xiii. 5, 6, 20, 21.

scriptures:^d and it will be verified to the eternal *disgrace* of those who have belied their profession, and to the utter *astonishment* of those who had given them credit for their sincerity.^e The pleas which may then be urged by the hypocrites themselves, will be of no avail:^f the secrets of their hearts will be made manifest:^g and the most signal judgments will be executed upon them.^{h]}

APPLICATION

1. Let us examine well the grounds of our confidence

[It is a great mercy to have confidence towards God, provided it be founded on the word of God, and accompanied with a consistent conduct.ⁱ But it is inexpressibly awful to deceive ourselves. Let us then bring our experience to the touchstone of God's word;^k and beg of God to search and try us to the uttermost.^l]

2. Let us endeavour to maintain a close walk with God

[How solemnly did our Lord warn his own disciples to "beware of hypocrisy," that cursed leaven that is so apt to defile our souls!^m Let us then look well, not to our actions only, but to our motives and principles of action; lest, while we "profess to know God, we in works, or in spirit, deny him."ⁿ]

^d Job xxxvi. 13, & xxvii. 8, 9. ^e Job xx. 4—7.

^f Matt. vii. 22, 23. ^g 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^h Their judgments are represented as the most severe of any: Matt. xxiv. 51. ⁱ Heb. iii. 6. 1 John iii. 20, 21.

^k Isaiah viii. 20.

^l Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^m Luke xii. 1.

ⁿ Tit. i. 16.

CCCCX. AGAINST SELF-CONFIDENCE.

1 Cor. x. 12. *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

THE things which are recorded in the holy scriptures are written, not for the entertainment, but for the real improvement, of our minds. Doubtless, as gratifying our curiosity, there is no book under heaven so interesting as the Bible: but as exhibiting what must be realized in our own experience, as shewing us our duties and our difficulties, our helps and our remedies,

our punishments and our rewards, it claims, infinitely beyond all other books, our unremitting attention. In this view the Apostle, having mentioned the misconduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the destruction which they brought upon themselves by means of it, finds upon their history this solemn admonition; "*therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*"

From these words we may learn

I. That all, even the most eminent, are liable to fall

[The most distinguished characters of antiquity have fallen^a— — — They have betrayed their weakness in those very points, wherein their eminence chiefly consisted^b— — — Who then amongst us will presume to say, "I am in no danger of falling?"^c— — —]

II. That the more self-confident we are, the more likely we are to fall

[Self-confidence naturally emboldens us to rush into temptation— — — And necessarily provokes God to leave us to ourselves— — — By means of the former, our occasions of falling are greatly multiplied: by means of the latter, our ability to stand is utterly withdrawn^d— — — God, for his own honour's sake, is concerned to let us fall, in order that we may know and confess, that our sufficiency for any good thing is derived from him alone^e— — —]

III. That, if we would be kept from falling, we must look well to our steps

[As in a slippery path peculiar caution is required, and an inattention to our steps will probably issue in some painful accident, so more especially is it necessary to use circumspection in the path of duty. Who can tell the snares and tempta-

^a *Noah*, Gen. vi. 9. with ix. 21. *Lot*, 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8. with Gen. xix. 33—36. *David*, Acts xiii. 22. with 2 Sam. xi. 4, 5, 15. *Solomon*, (who was called Jedediah, the beloved of the Lord, 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25.) 1 Kin. xi. 1—9.

^b *Abraham*, Rom. iv. 20. with Gen. xii. 12, 13, and xx. 2, 11. *Job*, Jam. v. 11. with Job iii. 3. *Moses*, Numb. xii. 3. with xx. 10, 11. *Jeremiah*, Jer. ix. 1. with xx. 8, 9. *Paul*, Acts xx. 24. with xviii. 9, 10. when he seems to have been struck with a panic.

^c John iv. 14. and 1 Pet. i. 23. shew the proper qualities and tendency of grace; but do not at all affect what the scriptures elsewhere affirm to be the tendency of our inherent corruption.

^d We have a striking example of this in Peter, who to gratify his curiosity went into the midst of his enemies, and was then left to experience his own weakness. Matt. xxvi. 58, 74.

^e Thus he acted towards the Israelites, Deut. i. 40—44.

tions that beset us? Who can tell what may be the consequences of any step we take? Who can reflect on all the circumstances that arose from one single glance of David's eye, and not feel himself exposed to continual danger? The most important events of our lives may be traced to some trivial cause; some matter of pure indifference: and events, equally or more important, perhaps no less than the everlasting salvation of our souls, may depend on the very next step we take. Surely then we should in "all things be circumspect;"^f we should "take heed to our ways;" we should walk in an humble dependence on God for direction and support; we should cry to him continually "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."^g]

We shall conclude this subject with a few words of **ADVICE**

1. To those who are offended at the falls of others

[Many, when they see a professor of religion act amiss, are ready to impute his misconduct to the gospel itself, as though Christianity were only a cloke for hypocrites. But, considering the temptations that surround us, and the corruptions that are within us, it is rather a wonder that any stand, than that some should fall. We mean not to justify, or to extenuate, the sins of any: but we desire that religion should not be represented as promoting that, which it utterly condemns. Let the blame fall on those who merit it, and not be cast indiscriminately on all who profess godliness. Let Judas be branded as a traitor; but let not the odium of *his* offence attach to all the other apostles, and to their divine Master.]

2. To those who are endeavouring to walk uprightly before God

[It is of considerable use to persons when walking on slippery ground, to have hold of each other, that if one slip, the other may afford him immediate assistance. Many falls and bruises have been escaped by these means. Thus it is of great importance to Christians to walk together in love, each helping to support his neighbour, and receiving help from others in the time of need.^h Let all then watch over one another with a godly jealousy. If one fall, let others endeavour instantly, in meekness, to raise him up.ⁱ Above all, let every one know in whom his strength is; and pray continually, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe."^k]

"Now to him, who is able to keep us from falling, &c. be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."^j]

^f Exod. xxiii. 13.

^g Ps. xvii. 5.

^h Eccl. iv. 9, 10.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 1.

^k Ps. cxix. 117.

^l Jude xxiv. 25.

CCCCXI. THE CONSEQUENCE OF NOT REMEMBERING OUR LATTER END.

Lam. i: 9. *She remembereth^a not her latter end; therefore she came down wonderfully:*

TO men in general nothing appears sinful but that which violates in the grossest manner some positive command, and interrupts in a very high degree the welfare of society. But God considers an unprofitable servant as deserving the same doom as the dishonest; and informs us, that an unmindfulness of our latter end will bring his judgments upon us, no less than a determined commission of every thing that is evil.

The prophet Jeremiah is lamenting the sore bondage under which his country groaned in Babylon, and is assigning the reasons for which God had thus rejected her: But in doing this, he does not fix on any one particular sin, however great; but on that which had pervaded all ranks of people, their unmindfulness of their latter end.

In his words we read

I: Their sin

This is the common sin of all mankind

[Moses had forewarned the Jews of the things that should come upon them in the latter days: but they had never duly considered his predictions, nor laboured to avert the threatened calamities. Thus has God warned us also of the miseries which the wicked shall endure in another world: but we will not regard his admonitions. The gay, the worldly, the ambitious are intent on their several pursuits; but none says, “Where is God my Maker?”^b Even those who profess some regard for religion, are yet, for the most part, very little engaged in a preparation for eternity: their zeal, in the pursuit of heavenly things, bears no proportion to the importance of their object, or even to the labours which others use for the attainment of worldly vanities.]

Nor let this be thought a venial matter

[This it was, which brought down Jerusalem: and it will involve us also in the heaviest calamities. And well it may: for it is a contempt of God our Maker. In this view he him-

^a It should rather be, remembered. ^b Job xxxv. 10. Ps. xiv. 2, 3.

self complains of it;^c and he represents all his attributes and perfections as dishonoured by it.^d It is also *a contempt of Christ our Saviour*. He has even “died, to purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works;” but, by our indifference, we make light of his mercies,^e and trample on his blood.^f Finally, it is *a contempt of our own souls*. The most avowed enemies of God and his Christ profess to have some regard for their immortal souls: but God, who will not put a wrong construction upon our actions, tells us, that “he who refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul.”^g Indeed this is but too manifest; since the man who remembers not his latter end, practically says, “Give me the things which my body most affects; and, as for my soul, I care not for it: if my soul can be saved, notwithstanding my indulgence of the body, it is well: but if their interests clash, I will gratify my body, though at the peril, yea, to the certain destruction of my soul.”

Can that then be light and venial, which involves in it such awful consequences? Surely, though no flagrant crime were ever committed, this alone would be sufficient to bring upon us God’s eternal wrath and indignation.]

The evil of such conduct will abundantly appear, if we notice

II. Their punishment

The downfall of Jerusalem was a fit emblem of that which awaits impenitent transgressors

[Let us only compare the departure of Israel out of Egypt, guided, protected, and supported by God himself, and their establishment and increase in the land of Canaan, with their miserable condition when they were carried captive to Babylon: “How was the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed!” Thus wonderful will be our destruction also, if we continue to forget our latter end.]

God himself warns us that our destruction will be great, if we neglect our souls

[It will be sudden^h—tremendousⁱ—irremediable^j—and eternal^k— — — — —]

Let us reflect on the change experienced by the rich man in the parable;^m and we may conceive a little of that surprise

^c Ps. x. 4, 5, 6, 11, 13.

^d His majesty, Ps. xii. 4. his omniscience, Job xxii. 13, 14. his justice, Ps. xciv. 7. his goodness and forbearance, Rom. ii. 4.

^e Luke x. 16.

^f Acts xiii. 38—41. Heb. x. 28, 29.

^g Prov. xv. 32.

^h Ps. lxxviii. 17—20. 1 Thess. v. 3.

ⁱ Jer. xxiii. 17—20.

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 1.

^j 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

^m Luke xvi. 19, 23.

and horror that will seize on us in the instant of our departure from the body.

Let us also, if we would escape this doom, regard the solemn warning, and the compassionate advice, which God himself has recorded for our instruction.^{n]}

We may IMPROVE this subject yet further

1. For the warning even of real Christians

[We will suppose that your concern for your souls is such as to secure eternal happiness: yet a declension in holy zeal will produce a proportionable declension both in your graces and your comforts.^o Let those who have ever experienced the blessedness of living nigh to God, and of being on the wing for heaven, compare it with the darkness and misery of a drooping and deserted state; and they will see enough to make them watchful against spiritual decays, and increasingly mindful of their eternal interests.]

2. For their comfort and encouragement

[There is a truth, not expressed indeed, but evidently implied in the text, namely, That all who remember their latter end, shall be wonderfully exalted. And what an encouraging truth is this! Let any one view Lazarus at the rich man's gate, and in Abraham's bosom,^p and he will see what a wonderful exaltation awaits the righteous at their departure hence. Even here the children of the devil shall become "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty:"^q but hereafter they shall reign with him as partners of his glory.^r Let this hope then animate the Christian in his difficulties, and stimulate us all to more abundant diligence in our heavenly calling.^s]

ⁿ Deut. xxxii. 18, 20, 29.

^o Ps. xxx. 7. Song v. 2—6.

^p Luke xvi. 20—22.

^q 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^r Rom. viii. 17.

^s 1 John iii. 3.

CCCCXII. AGAINST AN OVER-RIGHTEOUS SPIRIT.

Eccles. vii. 16. *Be not righteous over-much.*

THIS is the sheet-anchor of ungodly men—They hate to see a zeal for God, and therefore endeavour to repress it—From the days of Cain to this hour, they who have been born after the flesh, have persecuted those who have

been born after the Spirit—And when they find that neither contempt nor threatenings will avail any thing, they will venture, as Satan before them did,^b to draw their weapons from the very armoury of God—

It must be confessed, that the sense of this passage is not obvious at first sight; and it has been variously interpreted by commentators—Some have thought it to be the speech of an infidel recommending Solomon, in reply to his observation in the preceding verse, to avoid an excess either in religion or in vice—But it is evidently a serious admonition given by Solomon himself—In ver. 15. he mentions two things which had appeared strange to him, namely, Many righteous people suffering even unto death for righteousness sake; and, many wicked people, whose lives were justly forfeited, eluding, either through force or fraud, the punishment they deserved—From hence he takes occasion to caution both the righteous and the wicked; *the righteous*, ver. 16, not to bring trouble on themselves by an injudicious way of manifesting their religion, or to “suffer as evil-doers;” and *the wicked*, ver. 17, not to presume upon always escaping with impunity; for that justice will sooner or later surely overtake them—He then recommends to both of them to pay strict attention to the advice given them, and to cultivate the true fear of God, ver. 18, as the best preservative against wickedness on the one hand, and indiscretion on the other—

This being the sense of the whole passage, we proceed to the consideration of the text; in illustrating which we shall

I. Explain the caution

The misconstruction put upon the text renders it necessary to explain

1. To what the caution does not extend

[Solomon certainly never intended to caution us against *loving God* too much; seeing that we are commanded to “love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;”^c nor against *serving the Lord Jesus Christ* too much; since he “died for us that we might live to him;”^d and we should be “willing to be bound or even to die for his sake;”^e nor against too much *purity of heart*; for we are re-

^a Gal. iv. 29.

^d 2 Cor. v. 15.

^b Matt. iv. 6.

^e Acts xxi. 13. Luke xiv. 26.

^c Mark xii. 30.

quired to purify ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,^f yea, to purify ourselves even as he is pure^g——Nor could he mean to caution us against too much *deadness to the world*; for, *provided we conscientiously fulfil the duties of our station*, we cannot be too much “crucified to the world;”^h we should no more be of the world than Christ himself was—Nor, lastly, did he intend to warn us against too much *compassion for souls*; for, *provided our mode of manifesting that compassion be discreet*, it would be well if our “head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears to weep for the ungodly day and night”^k—These indeed are things in which the world does not wish to see us much occupied—They would rather that we should put our light under a bushel—But no inspired writer would ever caution us against excess in such things as these—St. Paul makes the proper distinction between the regard which we should shew to carnal and to spiritual objects; “Be not drunk with wine, *wherein is excess*; but be filled with the Spirit;” because therein is no possibility of excess!^l—]

2. To what the caution does extend

[*An intemperate zeal* appears to be the principal thing against which the text is levelled—Too high a conceit of our own wisdom, a hasty persuasion that we are right, and an indiscreet method of fulfilling what we suppose to be our duty, may be found in persons who really mean well—Two apostles, from zeal for their Master, would have called fire from heaven to consume a village that had refused him admission^m—And a third defended his Master with a sword, to the endangering of his own life, and to the dishonour of the cause he had espousedⁿ—Thus do many at this day, contend for the truth *in private* in an unbecoming spirit, and go forth to propagate it *in public*, to the neglect of their proper duty, and the injury of the Christian cause^o—*A blind superstition* may also be fitly comprehended in the caution—This obtained in a very great degree among the judaizing Christians; and still prevails over a great part of the Christian world; would to God we could except even Protestants themselves from the charge!—How often do we see a most rigorous regard paid to rites that are of human invention, whilst the true spirit and temper of Christianity is sadly neglected!—Alas! what fiery and fatal contentions have arisen from this source!—There is a needless scrupulosity also which ought to be avoided—What schisms has this occasioned in the church, when, on account of one

^f 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^g 1 John iii. 3.

^h Gal. vi. 14.

ⁱ John xvii. 14, 16.

^k Jer. ix. 1.

^l Eph. v. 18.

^m Luke ix. 54.

ⁿ John xviii. 10.

^o 1 Cor. vii. 20.

or two things, in which they could not agree, men have rent the seamless robe of Christ into a thousand pieces!—What injury have men done to their bodies by penances of man's device!—What trouble and perplexity have they also brought upon their souls by rash vows, and foolish impositions!—Such was the spirit against which St. Paul guarded the Christians at Colosse^p—And Solomon's caution against the same will be useful in every age and place—*A self-justifying dependence on our own works is nearly allied to the foregoing evils, and is thought by some to be the more immediate object of Solomon's censure*—But if we allow it not the first place, we may very properly mention it as another mistaken method of displaying our righteousness—Every person is prone to it; and the most upright persons need to be cautioned against it, because there is not any thing more destructive in its issue—It deprives us of all the benefit of whatever good we do; yea, it makes even the death of Christ of no effect^q—We can never therefore be too strongly guarded against it—We may have much zeal of this kind: but it is a zeal without knowledge—Nor is there any salvation for us, unless, like the holy apostle, we renounce it utterly^r]—]

Having explained at large the import of this caution, we shall

II. Subjoin some advice

We fear that, however great occasion there may be to caution sincere people against erroneous methods of exercising their religion, there is far more occasion to exhort the world in general to pay some attention to their duty—Our first advice therefore is

1. Be *truly* righteous

[They who are most ready to quote the text are, for the most part, those who are adverse to the exercise of all religion—And when they exclaim, **Be not righteous over-much**, their meaning is, **Be not righteous *at all***—They would be far better pleased to see all walking in the broad road, than to be put to shame by those who are walking in the narrow path—But let no scoffs keep you from the performance of your duty—If the world set themselves against religion, let not that deter any upright soul—Our Lord has taught us to expect that our “greatest foes would be those of our own household”—Let us not be discouraged if we find it so—Let our enquiry be, What is duty? and, having found that, let nothing turn us aside—Let us not be satisfied with the degree of righteousness which

^p Col. ii. 18—23.

^q Gal. v. 4.

^r Phil. iii. 9.

the world approves—Let us examine the scripture to see what God requires—Let us see how the saints of old served God—And let us labour in every thing to “do his will on earth, even as it is done in heaven”—This is a conduct which will tend, not to our destruction, but salvation—To act otherwise will issue in our ruin; since “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God”^s—But to walk after this rule is to insure present and everlasting peace—]

2. Be *wisely* righteous

[“It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;” and to “maintain a conscience void of offence towards both God and man”—But we are far from recommending a wild inconsiderate regard for religion—We ought to exercise a sound judgment in all things—“I wisdom,” says Solomon, “dwell with prudence”^t—There is certainly much room for discretion in the performance of our duty even towards God himself—We may so reprove a fault as to harden those whom we endeavour to reclaim, and, by casting pearl before swine, may cause them to turn again and rend us”—We may exercise our Christian liberty so as to cast a stumbling-block before others, and destroy the souls whose salvation we ought to seek to the uttermost^u—Many things may be “lawful which are not expedient”—We should therefore consult times, persons, places, things;^v and “walk in wisdom toward them that are without”—Our determination should be, “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way”^w—And our prayer should be, “O give me understanding in the way of godliness”—In every part of our conduct we should be circumspect, that being “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, we may shine among them as lights in the world”—Thus should we unite “the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove”^a—And in so doing we shall both adorn our holy profession, and “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men”—]

3. Be righteous *enough*

[There is more danger of defect than of excess in this pursuit—Indeed whereinsoever you are *truly* righteous it is not possible to be righteous *overmuch*—We are to “walk as Christ himself walked,” and to “be perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect”—Have you attained much? be thankful for it; but go forward—If you were as holy as St. Paul himself, you must “not think you have already attained;

^s 1 John iii. 10.

^t Prov. viii. 12.

^u Matt. vii. 6.

^x 1 Cor. viii. 11.

^v Eccl. viii. 5.

^w Ps. ci. 2.

^a Matt. x. 16.

or are already perfect; but like him, you must forget the things that are behind; and reach forward unto that which is before, and press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"—The higher you are in grace, the richer will you be in glory—Begin then, all of you, to "run the race that is set before you"—The prize is worth all your care—Lose it not for want of due exertion—But "laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset you, run with patience your appointed course, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of your faith"—And let your constant motto be, "*This one thing I do*"^b—Endeavour, every step you take, to walk in the fear of God—This is the advice of Solomon himself^c—Nor can there be any better preservative against extremes than this—By this you will be kept from the undue bias of fleshly wisdom, and from consulting with flesh and blood—By this you will be enabled to maintain your conversation in the world with "simplicity and godly sincerity"—Cultivate this, and the path of duty will be clear—Cultivate this, and you will never lose the promised reward—]

^b Phil. iii. 13.

^c Ver. 18.

CCCCXIII. MAN'S INSTABILITY AND GOD'S FORBEARANCE.

Hos. vi. 4. *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*

WHEREVER the gospel is faithfully preached, some are savingly converted by it. But of those who "run well for a season, many are hindered" in their course, and many turn back again to the world. Such were they to whom God spake in the words before us.^a The word had produced some good effect among them; but their penitence was of very short duration. God therefore

^a We may indeed interpret the three first verses of this chapter as descriptive of what shall take place in the latter day; and so consider the words of the text as a continuation of the complaints uttered against the Jews in the preceding chapter. But we know that there were some partial reformations, as under Hezekiah and Josiah; and therefore we may well explain the passage as belonging to the people of that generation.

took up this pathetic lamentation over them; which leads us to notice

I. The instability of man

Man in his best estate is a weak and frail creature; But "Ephraim" (who had cast off the worship of God) and "Judah" (who retained the form but without the power of godliness) may properly be considered as characterizing two different descriptions of persons, namely, mere nominal Christians, and those who make some profession of religion. We shall therefore notice the instability

1. Of merely nominal Christians

[However men may have shaken off all regard for God, there have been times when they entertained some good desires, and some purposes of amendment. They did not always sin with the same ease that they now do. We may appeal to all, whether there has not been some period of their life when their mind was comparatively tender, and when they felt, in some little measure, the importance of preparing for death and judgment?]

But these seasons have passed away without any permanent effect; and the appearances of good have altogether vanished. Fitly therefore are they compared to a morning cloud, and to the early dew: for, as in a season of drought the morning clouds, which seemed to portend rain, are soon scattered; and the dew, which seemed a welcome substitute for rain, is exhaled, before it has penetrated to the roots, and thereby the expectations of the husbandman are disappointed; so it is with them; their vows are forgotten, their consciences are become callous, and all prospect of their conversion is annihilated.^b]

2. Of many who make a profession of religion

[Many, like those addressed in the text, have at some time appeared penitent, and have excited both in themselves and others a hope that they would one day be faithful followers of the Lamb. But they have "left off to behave themselves wisely." "The cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things," have turned them aside; so that they are as barren and unfruitful as if they had never professed themselves the Lord's people.]

How many have there been in every age who have thus "made shipwreck of their faith!" And how many amongst

^b See this exemplified in Pharaoh, Exod. x. 16, 28. in the Israelites, Exod. xxxiii. 4. with Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. in Felix, Acts xxiv. 25, 27.

ourselves perhaps, have declined from the ways of God, and given reason to fear that "their last end will be worse than their beginning!"^c

These are yet more strictly conformed to the images in the text, inasmuch as the hopes and prospects they afforded were more flattering, and the state in which they are left, is more desperate and afflictive.^e]

No subject whatever reflects more light than this upon

II. The forbearance of God

We must not suppose that God is really at a loss what to do, since both his wisdom and power are infinite. But the expressions in the text import

1. That he is extremely averse to punish us as we deserve

[Our provocations against him have been such as nothing but infinite patience could have endured. He *complains* of us that "we have wearied him," and that "he is pressed under us as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves."^d He *appeals* to us that he has omitted nothing on his part that could tend to our good:^e and *expostulates* with us respecting our obstinacy in destroying ourselves.^f When there seems scarcely any hope left, he *declares* that *he cannot endure the thought* of giving us up:^g and, in the words before us, *intimates the perplexity of his mind* halting between his duty as a lawgiver, and his inclinations as a parent. Well may it be said of him, that "judgment is his strange work;"^h for his whole conduct towards us shews, that he is "slow to anger and rich in mercy."ⁱ]

2. That there is nothing he can do consistently with his own honour which he is not ready to do for our salvation

[He cannot save us in an impenitent state: *that* would be a violation of his justice, his holiness, and his truth. But if we would repent, he would forgive us for his dear Son's sake: if we would pray to him for his holy Spirit, he would renew us, sanctify us, establish us. Whatever his wisdom could devise for our good or his power execute, he would be ready to effect, if only we would "cleave to him with full purpose of heart."

^c See instances of this also in Demas. Compare Philem. 24. with 2 Tim. iv. 10. See also 1 Tim. i. 19. and iii. 6. and v. 12, 15. and 2 Tim. ii. 18. and iv. 4.

^d Mal. ii. 17. Amos ii. 13.

^e Mic. vi. 3. Jer. ii. 5. Isaiah v. 4.

^g Hos. xi. 7, 8.

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

^b Isaiah xxviii. 21.

ⁱ Neh. ix. 17.

How strongly is this intimated in the tender manner of his address, “**O** Ephraim, **O** Judah,” as though he spoke to every one of us severally by name; and by the repetition of that question, “What shall I do unto thee?” Let a reciprocal tenderness be excited in our hearts towards him; and both the grounds and consequences of his anger shall be soon removed.]

ADDRESS

1. Those whose goodness has altogether vanished

[How many have reason to look back with shame, and to say, “**O** that it were with me as in months passed!”^k Once you felt *some* concern about your soul; but now you are regardless of your eternal interests: once you had *some* prospect of heaven; but now you have none at all. Consider what a melancholy state this is; and that, if you continue in it till you go to the bar of judgment, your condition will be most desperate for ever. Be assured that God will be at no loss how to deal with you then: there will be no longer any conflict in his mind between wrath and pity: abused patience will demand your punishment; and that punishment shall correspond with your iniquity.^l **O** that you were wise, and would consider your latter end!]

2. Those who are yet in an hopeful way

[Some there are, we trust, over whom the clouds are yet suspended, and the dew is yet lying with prolific virtue. **O** beg of God, that no wind of temptation may dispel the one, no sun of persecution exhale the other. “Remember Lot’s wife:” and watch against every thing that may impede your progress, or shake your constancy. Be much in prayer, that God would “carry on his good work within you, and perform it to the day of Christ.” Guard as much against self-dependence as against the grossest of sins: for “God is a jealous God,” and will leave you to learn by bitter experience what is in your heart, if you trust in an arm of flesh.^m “Trust in him only, and with your whole heart;” and he will “perfect that which concerneth you,” and “preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom.”]

^k Job xxix. 2.

^l Compare Hos. xiii. 3. with the text.

^m 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

CCCCXIV. AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

Job xx. 4—7. *Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever, like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?*

PREJUDICE or passion will miserably warp the judgment—

It will hide from us what we might know, and cause us to pervert what we do know—

Never was this more strongly exemplified than in the friends of Job—

Had they calmly considered, they might have comforted him in his affliction—

But, by a hasty misapplication of acknowledged truths, they most unjustly and cruelly condemned him—

Job had hinted to them the evil and danger of their conduct—

And Zophar, irritated at the caution, replies with great severity—

His words however, though misapplied, suggest to us two very important truths respecting sinners

I. Their prosperity is transient

Of sinners, some *make no profession* of religion, and others *a false profession*—

Each of these characters may enjoy, for awhile, great prosperity

[The *profane* are often exalted to places of dignity and power—

They prosper in all their labours for wealth and preferment—

They not only despise, but perhaps persecute the godly—

They “triumph,” as though no evil should ever happen unto them—

This the Psalmist saw with deep regret—

Hypocrites also frequently are held in estimation—

‘They are objects of envy to many an humble and contrite soul—

They will boast of experiences which might well be coveted—

^a Job xix. 28, 29.

^b Ps. lxxiii. 3—12.

^c Rev. iii. 1.

And even attain considerable heights of joy^d—
Their “ excellency may mount up to the heavens, and their heads reach unto the clouds”—]

But their prosperity will be of short duration
[Death will speedily seize upon the most stout-hearted sinner—

Then all, which he gloried in, shall come to an end—
None of his “ pomp shall follow him,” or his “ wealth be carried with him”—

The hypocrite also shall have a period put to his dissimulation—

He shall soon appear in his proper character—
The all-seeing God will discover the secrets of his heart—
Nor is this time at any great distance—
In comparison of eternity, the duration of his joy will be “but a moment”]

Then will they experience a sad reverse

II. Their ruin will be tremendous

The ungodly will in due time be visited for their offences—

They will then “perish”
1. To their own eternal shame
[Many portions of scripture appear to us indelicate—
But God’s representations of sin are surely just—
And well calculated to make us nauseate and loathe it—
Such is his description of the *ways* of sinners^e—
And such his declaration respecting their *end*^f—
They will perish under circumstances of disgrace and ignominy—

Christ will not deign to own them before his Father^g—
The angels will come forth to execute the vengeance of God upon them—

The saints would even “thrust them out of heaven” if they should seek admittance there^h—

The damned themselves will insult them with bitter tauntsⁱ—
Nor shall they ever cease to be objects of contempt and abhorrence—

This is told us in the plainest terms!—
Nor while they retain, as they must, their character, is it possible that their situation ever should be changed^m—]

2. To the astonishment of all that knew them
[The question “Where is he?” refers primarily to the utter extinction of the ungodly—

^d Matt. xiii. 20.

^e Deut. xxxii. 35.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 22.

^g Compare Rev. iii. 16. with the text.

^h Matt. x. 33.

ⁱ Luke xiii. 28.

^k Isaiah xiv. 9—16.

^l Prov. xiii. 5. Dan. xii. 2.

^m Rev. xxii. 11.

But it may well be considered also as an expression of surprise—

The wicked little think where their course will terminate—

If the rich man's request had been granted,ⁿ what reply would his surviving brethren have made so soon as that in the text?^o—

The hypocrites also often escape detection in this world—

Perhaps they were celebrated, after their departure, as eminent saints—

We may conceive that their dearest friends, or their associates in holy exercises, may enquire after them in heaven—

What surprise and horror must seize them, when they hear of the doom which the heart-searching God has passed upon them!^p—]

ADDRESS—"KNOW YOU NOT THIS?"

Know you not that this has been so from the beginning of the world?

[Does not the word of God assert, that "it shall be ill with the wicked?"^q—

Does not the most authentic history in the world prove it to have been so?^r

Does not conscience itself testify that it shall be so still?—]

If you know, do you not consider this?

[Can any thing be more worthy of our consideration?—

If we have "but a moment," should we not improve that moment?—

Are we willing to perish in this ignominious and awful manner?—]

Let us live no longer in the neglect of religion

[The gratifications of sense can last but for a little time—

ⁿ Luke xvi. 23, 27, 28.

^o They would most probably have exclaimed, "Where is he! in hell! lifting up his eyes in torments! Is it really so? We never could have thought it: we had no doubt but that he was happy: he seemed to us as worthy and blameless a character as any: nor had he himself any doubts but that he was going to heaven."

^p If a minister is to have those as his "joy and crown of rejoicing," who were truly converted by his ministry, we may, not improperly, suppose a degree of disappointment, if he miss those, concerning whom he had entertained the most sanguine hopes. We may suppose him, upon the first discovery, to say, "Where is he! What, HE in hell! I often feared that I myself should go thither; but who would have thought that HE should?" The Lord grant that this may never be realized by any of us!

^q Isaiah iii. 11. Ps. ix. 17.

^r Where are now the antediluvian scoffers, the haughty Pharaoh, the treacherous Judas, the worldly-minded Demas, the heretical Hymeneus? &c.

But the consequences of neglecting God will endure for ever—

Surely the care of the soul is the “one thing needful”—]

Nor let us rest in a “form of godliness” without experiencing “its power”

[It will avail us little to deceive our fellow-creatures—

The higher we have been in their estimation, the deeper will be our disgrace—

Let us then go to Christ for the remission of past sins—

Let us approve ourselves to him in future, as “servants that need not be ashamed”—

And labour to be “sincere and without offence until his coming again”—]

CCCCXV. THE PRAYERS OF UNREGENERATE MEN CONSIDERED.

Hos. vii. 14. *They have not cried unto me with their heart; when they howled upon their beds.*

IT is not without reason that prayer has been called by some, The pulse of the soul: for by *that* more than by any thing else may be discerned the increase or declension of our spiritual health. Somewhat like prayer may be offered by the most ungodly in seasons of deep distress: but their supplications differ widely from those which proceed from a penitent and contrite heart. The ten tribes, who, in spite of all the warnings given them, would go to Egypt and Assyria, rather than to God, for help, found themselves taken in the net which God had spread for them. *Then* they began to call upon God for help: but, the heart-searching God testifies respecting them, that they cried not unto him with their heart when they howled upon their beds.

To shew how common and awful this state is, we shall

I. Consider the prayers of unregenerate men

It is confessed such persons often “howl upon their beds”

[In these words two things are to be noticed, namely, the time; and the manner of their prayers. With respect to the

time, it is too generally found, that they who are not in earnest about their salvation, defer their prayers till bedtime: instead of transacting their business with God while their faculties are alive, they stay till exhausted nature is become incapable of any energetic exertion; and then hurry over some form of prayer, as a school-boy does his task, without feeling one word they utter. Even this is too favourable a representation of the prayers of many; who stay till they have lain down “upon their bed,” and then fall asleep in the midst of their devotions. As for praying in the morning, they have no time for that: the concerns of the past, or of the present day have preoccupied their minds; and if they offer two or three cold petitions while they are dressing, it is quite as much as their souls require, or as God deserves. As to the *manner*, we may interpret the prophet’s expression as importing in general, that their prayers are altogether *irrational*: and indeed, if we take into the account the state of the suppliants as guilty and condemned sinners, and the majesty of him whom they profess to address, their prayers are a most horrid mockery, yea, as unsuitable to the occasion as the “howling” of a dog would be. But the expression may be taken more strictly and literally: for these persons will not pray with any degree of fervour except in seasons of great affliction. Perhaps they have suffered some heavy loss, or are in embarrassed circumstances, or have some peculiar guilt upon their conscience, that greatly disturbs them; but even then they have no disposition to spread their case before God; and so they lie down upon their beds as miserable as they can be, “howling” and whining like dogs, and perhaps wishing that they were dogs, or any thing, rather than rational and accountable beings.^{a]}

But, whatever their prayers be, “they cry not unto God with their heart”

[View them in their *public* devotions; they will confess themselves “miserable sinners,” and implore mercy for Christ’s sake at the hands of God, and desire grace from him “that they may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of his holy name;” but if they were afterwards told by their minister, that they were miserable and hell-deserving sinners; that nothing but an application of the blood of Christ to their souls could ever save them; and that, to evince the sincerity of their repentance, they must devote themselves unreservedly to God; they would shew by their answers that they neither believed, nor desired, any one of the things, which they had uttered before God.

Enquire, further, into their *private* prayers, and it will be

^a See this exemplified in David, Ps. xxxii. 3, 4.

found that they are not sincere in any petition that they offer. If, for instance, they were to pray, that they might become true and faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus; and Jesus were to tell them, as he did the rich youth in the gospel, that they must first be deprived of all that they possess in this world, before they can ever be brought to love him supremely; would they reply to him, "Thy will be done?" Would they not plead for this or that sum, "Oh, spare it; is it not a little one?" and, when they found that the terms could not be lowered, would they not pray back again their prayers with tenfold more earnestness than they at first uttered them; and sacrifice their hope in Christ rather than their worldly interests?^b

Such are the prayers of the unregenerate, *if they pray at all*: but the greater part of them, except on very particular occasions, do not so much as preserve even an appearance of devotion.]

We shall have a little clearer view of the worthlessness of such prayers, if we

II. Contrast them with those of the regenerate

In every thing that is essential to prayer, the difference may be seen. Particularly they differ in respect of

1. Voluntariness

[The wicked will only pray under some heavy calamity, or in the near prospect of death and judgment:^c all their petitions are extorted by anguish or by terror. The regenerate, on the contrary, go to God willingly and cheerfully as to their father and their friend. We do not mean to say, that the godly never feel backwardness to this duty (for, alas! they too often do) but they do not indulge it; they do not rest satisfied in such a state; they condemn themselves for it as much as an unregenerate person would condemn himself for the grossest sins: and when they are enabled, in any measure, to realize their principles, they account it their sweetest privilege to draw nigh to God, and to pour out their souls before him: they even pant for God as the hart after the water brooks, and "go to him as to their exceeding joy."^d]

2. Constancy

[When the distresses or terrors, that instigated the ungodly to prayer, are removed, there is an end of the importunity which was occasioned by them.^e The persons who for

^b Mark x. 21, 22. This shews with what lamentable propriety they speak of "saying their prayers."

^c Jer. ii. 27. Ps. lxxviii. 34. Isaiah xxvi. 16.

^d Ps. xliii. 1, 2. & xliv. 4.

^e Job xxvii. 10.

a while seemed melted in the furnace, are no sooner taken out of it, than they return to their wonted coldness and obduracy. But a regenerate person can say, "My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed:" "at evening, and at morning, and at noon-day will I pray, and that instantly."^f There are seasons indeed, when he may, through the corruptions of his heart, be led to relax his diligence: but he can never give over prayer: whether he be in prosperity or adversity, he feels that he is altogether dependent upon God, both for his present and eternal happiness; and therefore he returns again and again to God, in order to maintain fellowship with him, and to receive at his hands the blessings he stands in need of.]

3. Humility

[Persons may use very strong language and express a kind of indignation against themselves in reference to their inward corruptions, while yet they are not truly humbled before God: but true humility consists, not in vehement expressions, but in a tenderness of spirit mixed with self-loathing and self-abhorrence.^g Of this, an unregenerate man has no conception: yet it is this that constitutes the chief excellence of prayer: and without it our prayers can find no more acceptance with God, than the howling of a dog.^h In this view, God himself calls the services of the temple an hateful "noise;"ⁱ and declares, that the offering of a lamb with an unhumbled spirit, is as odious in his sight, as the offering of swine's blood, or "the cutting off a dog's neck."^k]

INFER

1. How little dependence can be placed on a death-bed repentance!

[Far be it from us to discourage repentance at the last hour. On the contrary, if we behold symptoms of it, we would in the judgment of charity conclude well respecting its issue.

But it is God alone who can perfectly distinguish between the feigned humiliation of Ahab, and the sincere contrition of Peter: and perhaps, where we think we hear the supplications of a Christian, God may hear nothing but the howling of a dog. Repentance, like every Christian grace, must be judged of by its fruits; and if we would have in ourselves, or leave in the minds of surviving friends, an unquestionable evidence of our sincerity, let us repent without delay, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance."^j]

2. What encouragement have all real penitents to call upon God!

^f Ps. lvii. 7. and lv. 17.

^g Job xlvi. 6. Ezek. xx. 43.

^h Matt. xv. 8, 9.

ⁱ Amos v. 23.

^k Isaiah lxvi. 3.

[As God can distinguish hypocrites in the midst of their most specious services, so can he discern the upright in the midst of all their infirmities. The sigh, the groan, the tear; the broken accents of contrition, are more pleasing to him than the most fluent petitions that are destitute of a divine unction.¹ Let none then be discouraged because they do not find a ready utterance in prayer; but let them be chiefly solicitous to "cry to God with their hearts." Then they will have nothing to fear; for "God will hear them, yea, and answer too, while they are yet speaking to them,"^m and "will do for them abundantly above all that they can ask or think."ⁿ]

¹ Ps. vi. 8. and xxxviii. 9. and lxxix. 11.

^m Isaiah lxv. 24.

ⁿ Eph. iii. 20.

CCCCXVI. A WARNING TO CARNAL AND EARTHLY-MINDED PROFESSORS.

Phil. iii. 18, 19. *Many walk, of whom I have told you often; and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things:*

NOTWITHSTANDING the utter extinction of vital godliness from the heart of man, through the introduction of sin into the world, there remain within him some principles of goodness, weakened indeed, but still operative and lively. Among these we may notice humanity and compassion, which often work in the breasts of the unregenerate, so as even to shame those who are endowed with a principle of true religion. There is, however, one essential difference between this disposition as it is exercised by unconverted men, and the same as cultivated by the godly: in the former, it extends no further than to the temporal condition of mankind; but in the latter, it terminates chiefly on their spiritual and eternal state. Hence we frequently see both prophets and apostles expressing with tears their concern for the souls of those around them. In the passage before us, St. Paul was filled with the tenderest emotions of pity, while he beheld the state of many in

the Christian church, whose character and end he most pathetically describes.

In illustrating his statement, we shall consider

I. The lamentable state of some professors

St. James speaks of a principle that is “earthly, sensual devilish,”^a and such is that, by which too many, who profess godliness, are actuated.

1. “Their belly is their God”

[By “the belly,” we understand the sensual appetite:^b and to make “a god” of it, is to yield ourselves up to its dominion. And must we go to heathen countries to find persons of this description? are not “many” such to be found in the Christian church? Many, alas! are addicted to gluttony, to drunkenness, to whoredom: and among those who are free from these gross excesses, how many are there who have no higher end of life than to consult their own ease and pleasure, and whose labours in all their younger years, are with a view to provide these very enjoyments for them in the decline of life! What is this but to put the gratification of their sensual appetite in the place of God, whose will should be the only *rule*, and whose glory, the ultimate *end*, of all their actions?]

2. “They glory in their shame”

[Whatever proceeds from a corrupt principle, whether it be approved or not among men, is really a ground of shame: yet how many will boast of their vilest excesses, perhaps too, even of crimes which they have never committed! How many will glory in the insolence with which they have treated their superiors; the resentment they have shewn towards those who injured them; and the cunning they have exercised in a way of traffic; when, if they viewed these things aright, they would rather blush for their iniquities, and mourn over them in dust and ashes!]

Perhaps the apostle had a more especial reference to the judaizing teachers, who sought to distract the church of God, and gloried in the number of their proselytes. Such he justly calls “dogs, and evil workers:”^c and too many such there are also in this day, who care not how many of Christ’s flock they scatter and destroy, if they can but increase their own party.

Now to glory in sin, of whatever kind that sin be, is the very spirit of Satan himself, who accounts himself happy in proportion as he can weaken the kingdom of Christ, and establish his own empire over the hearts of men.]

^a Jam. iii. 15.

^b Rom. xvi. 18.

^c Ver. 2.

3. "They mind earthly things"

[To a certain degree earthly things must be minded: but we are not to savour, to relish, or to set our affections upon them.^d This would be as contrary to the mind and will of God, as to make a god of our belly, or to glory in our shame. Yet how many professed Christians are there who live under the habitual influence of an earthly mind, without ever conceiving that there is any thing wrong in their conduct! In spiritual employments they experience nothing but a stupid uniformity: but in temporal concerns they have many fluctuations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, according as their prospects of success brightens, or their apprehensions of disappointment increase. Whence arises this, but from the decided preference they give to carnal and earthly things, above those which are spiritual and heavenly?]

Fidelity requires, that, having delineated the conduct of these professors, we should set before you

II. The warning here given them

It is a painful task to rob any of their hopes, and to denounce the terrors of the Lord: and while we engage in it, we would, like the Apostle, proceed with the utmost tenderness and compassion. But we must, at the peril of our own souls, endeavour to undeceive those who are blinded by these delusions. Let such then know

1. Their real character

[Many, who are of this description, imagine that they are friends of the gospel, and that they have a great regard both for Christ and his people. But indeed, "they are enemies of the cross of Christ;" *they withstand its influence over themselves, and obstruct its influence over others.*

What was the intent of the death of Christ but to redeem us from all iniquity,^e and to deliver us from this present evil world,^f and to establish the dominion of Christ over our whole souls:^g This was the effect it produced on others;^h and would on us, if we thoroughly submitted to its influence. Whatever therefore we may imagine or profess, we really are enemies of the cross of Christ, as long as, in our spirit and conduct, we continue hostile to its main design.

The injury which such professors do to the cause of Christ, is incalculable. If they be openly profane, they explode religion altogether, and deter others from regarding its dictates: and if they be more decent in their conduct, they lead men, both by their conversation and example, to suppose

^d διεστρε. See Col. iii. 2.

^e 2 Cor. x. 5.

^e Tit. ii. 14.

^h Gal. vi. 14.

^f Gal. i. 4.

that religion consists in mere forms or notions, instead of an entire subjugation of the soul to Christ. In what light then must they appear before God? If "he that gathereth not with Christ, is as one that scattereth abroad,"ⁱ much more must they, who are thus actively engaged in scattering the flock, be deemed his enemies.]

2. Their certain end

[It is no wonder that they who mistake their own character, should deceive themselves also with respect to the state to which they are fast approaching. They conclude that their eternal interests are safe: but God declares, that "their end is destruction." Yes indeed! "their end must be according to their works."^r And do not the scriptures abundantly confirm this melancholy truth? "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."^k "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."^l "to be carnally-minded is death."^m In vain will be all pleas and pretences at the judgment-seat of Christ: to every worker of iniquity, whether he have been an open sensualist, or hypocritical professor, it will be said, "Depart from me, I never knew you."ⁿ]

We would subjoin a word or two of ADVICE

1. Beware lest you rest in an external profession of religion

[It is easy to adopt the creed of Christians, and to conform our lives to that standard which obtains generally in the world: But it is no easy matter to be a consistent Christian. To maintain an uniform course of self-denial, and of deadness to earthly things, and to glory only in the Lord, *these* are hard lessons: yet nothing less than this will prove us Christians indeed. It is not by our creed, or our professions, that we shall be judged; but by our "walk." By *that* therefore we must judge ourselves, if we would not be deceived to our eternal ruin.]

2. Watch over one another with care and tenderness

[None are at liberty to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?"^o We all should feel a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures: and especially when we behold those who profess to have the same faith and hope with ourselves, manifesting by their conduct the delusion of their minds, we should weep over them, and, with a mixture of fidelity and compassion, declare to them their danger. We are expressly told to "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day:"^p and though we shall not always give satisfaction to the persons

ⁱ Matt. xii. 30.

^k Rom. viii. 13.

^l 1 John ii. 15.

^m Rom. viii. 6.

ⁿ Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^o Gen. iv. 9.

^p Heb. iii. 13.

whom we warn, yet shall we really perform towards them the kindest office, and perhaps save them from the destruction to which they were hastening. Then shall we have reason to rejoice over them, as they also will have to bless God for us, to all eternity.]

CCCCXVII. A CAUTION AGAINST DEPARTING FROM GOD.

Heb. iii. 12—14. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.

THE consideration of the fulness and sufficiency of Christ, is that which animates the believer in all his conflicts: yet it is on no account to supersede our own care and watchfulness: on the contrary, it affords us the greatest encouragement to watch, because it ensures success to us in our endeavours, which, without his almighty aid, would be of no avail—In this view it is that the inspired writer calls us to “consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was not merely a servant, like Moses, but a son, the Heir and Lord of all, yea, the very builder of that spiritual house, of which we profess ourselves to be a part”—On this truth he grounds the exhortation in the text,^a in which he suggests

I. A solemn caution

Difficult as it is to come to God, we find it easy enough to depart from him—We should therefore be on our guard

1. Against any departure from him

[While men are yielding to temptation, and turning aside from the ways of God, they cherish an hope that they may still preserve their interest in his favour, though they be not studious to do his will—But a departure of any kind, whether

^a All the words between “Wherefore,” in ver. 7. and the text, are a parenthesis: we must therefore connect the text thus; “Wherefore” “take heed,” &c.

from the faith or practice of Christianity, is nothing less than a departure from God himself, even from him who is the only source of life and happiness—We cannot therefore be too much on our guard against any secret declensions, which are so dishonourable to him whom we profess to love, and so destructive of our present and eternal welfare—]

2. Against that unbelief from whence all declensions arise

[As faith is that which brings us to God, and keeps us stedfast in our adherence to him, so unbelief separates us from him, and, in proportion as it is harboured, invariable alienates us from the life of God—Whatever be the more immediate object of that unbelief, whether we attempt to lower the strictness of God's precepts, or question the varacity of his promises or threatenings, it proceeds equally from “an evil heart,” and brings with it the same pernicious consequences: it is a root of bitterness, which, if it be permitted to spring up, will cause every devout affection to wither and decay—We must therefore labour to eradicate it, if we would not eat for ever its bitter fruits—]

That his caution may have its due effect, the apostle prescribes

II. The means of improving it

Sin is of a deceitful and hardening nature

[When “a backslider in heart” commits a sin, many thoughts will arise in his mind to palliate the evil, and to make him think that it will not be attended with any important consequences—Soon he begins to doubt whether the thing be evil at all; and, ere long, to justify it from the peculiarity of his circumstances—At first he felt some remorse; but presently his conscience becomes less tender, till at last it is altogether seared and callous; so that, notwithstanding he be miserably departed from God, he is regardless of his loss, and insensible of his danger—Who that has ever noticed the workings of his own heart, has not found what a bewitching and besotting thing sin is? yea, who has not often seen reason to bewail its deceitful, hardening effects?—]

To guard effectually against it we should watch over each other

[Sin, from the foregoing qualities, naturally hides itself from our view, and renders us inattentive to the means of prevention—But ignorant as we often are of our own spirit, we see clearly enough the defects of others; yea, perhaps we condemn with severity in others the very things which we allow in ourselves—To watch over each other therefore, and

to warn each other of those declensions which we either see or apprehend, is a most valuable service; and, if performed with discretion and love, it can scarcely fail of producing the happiest effects—This is a duty to which God has solemnly called us in his word;^b and it is to be a part of our “daily” work—Our time for it will be very short: either we or our brother may be speedily removed; and our opportunity of benefiting his soul may be lost for ever—We should exhort one another therefore “daily, while it is called to-day;” and, though it is often an unpleasant office, we should use all fidelity in the execution of it—By this means we may restore a brother before he has relapsed too far, and preserve him from that departure from God, which would otherwise terminate in his destruction—]

Still further to enforce the caution given us, the apostle adds

III. A motive to regard it

Our final participation of Christ’s benefits depends on our stedfastness in the pursuit of them

[Without entering into the question, whether God have decreed the final perseverance of the saints, we may be fully assured, that none can obtain salvation but by persevering in the way of holiness to the end of life: the scriptures continually speak this language, “He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved:” “but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him”—It is true that believers are already *in a measure* “partakers of Christ:” but the complete enjoyment of his benefits is reserved for the future life: and we must not only have a scriptural and well-founded confidence at first, but must keep it stedfast even to the end, in order to attain that full possession of our inheritance—]

If any thing can stimulate us to caution, surely this must

[Eternity is at stake, and depends on our present conduct: according as we approve ourselves to the heart-searching God, will our state be fixed for ever—Is it not madness to be remiss and careless under such circumstances? Would any one, who should have reason to think his house were on fire, sit still without endeavouring to find out the latent grounds of his alarm? And shall we know our proneness to unbelief, and not guard against its operation, lest it lead us to apostasy? Shall we acknowledge the deceitful, hardening nature of sin, and not exhort each other to mortify and subdue it?—Surely if we have the smallest concern for our souls, we shall not only

^b Lev. xix. 17.

^c Matt. xxiv. 13. Heb. x. 38.

regard the caution given us in the text, but labour to improve it in the way prescribed—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who have never come to God at all

[The foregoing subject is *in itself* applicable to those only who profess religion; but it may be accommodated to those also who make no such profession: for, if they who have come to God are in danger of departing from him, and they who have enjoyed a scriptural confidence, may lose it; if they, who have believed, may “make shipwreck of their faith,” and they, who have “begun in the Spirit, may end in the flesh;” if they, who have “begun to run well, may be hindered,” and they who have “escaped the pollutions of the world, may again be entangled therein and overcome;” and, lastly, if they who “have been enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, may so fall away as never to be renewed unto repentance;” What must become of those who have never experienced any of these things? Can they be safe? Can they have any scriptural hope of heaven? If the strongest have so much need of caution, and the most circumspect such reason to fear the deceitful, hardening effects of sin, surely the careless have need to tremble, lest they “die in their sins,” and “be driven away in their wickedness”—If all, except two, of those who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness, can they hope to enter into the land of Canaan, who have never once come forth from their spiritual bondage?—The point is clear; may God enable us to lay it to heart, and to consider it with the attention it deserves!—]

2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies

[Much has already been spoken to you both in a way of caution and direction: we beg leave to add a word of encouragement—The thing, against which you are chiefly guarded, is unbelief; because *that* is the true source of all apostasy—We now would say, Be strong in faith giving glory to God—“Faith is the shield wherewith you are to quench the fiery darts” of your enemies—Only believe; and Omnipotence will come to your support—Only believe; and you shall experience “the mighty working of *his* power, who raised Christ from the dead”—Commit yourself to him “who is able to keep you from falling; and he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy”—]

CCCCXVIII. A GOOD AND EVIL CONSCIENCE.

1 John. iii. 20, 21. *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Brethren, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

IN the description given us of the day of judgment, we are informed that the Judge will be seated on his throne; that certain books will be opened; and that sentence will be passed on every one according to what was recorded in them.^a Such a tribunal there is, already erected in the bosoms of men. Conscience is seated there as supreme Judge: it keeps an account of every day's transactions: it summons men to its bar: it exhibits the record before their eyes; and, in perfect correspondence with their actions, it passes on them its authoritative sentence. Thus it anticipates the future judgment, and forces men to read in its decisions their final doom. To this effect the apostle speaks in the passage before us; in elucidating which, we shall shew

I. How far the testimonies of our conscience may be depended on

The testimonies of conscience are not always just

[With many there is a *sleepy* conscience, which suffers men to go on in their own ways without shame, and without remorse. So inactive and so callous is this faculty within them, that it is justly represented as "seared with an hot iron."^b Indeed, if it were not thus with them, how could they go on so cheerfully as they do, in an open course of sin, or in a wilful neglect of God?]

With many also there is a *partial* conscience. They discern what is wrong in others, but not in themselves: or they notice some evils, but not others. Herod would not violate his oath; but he would murder a prophet.^c And the Pharisees would not put into the treasury the money that was the price of blood; but they would persist in persecuting the innocent Jesus even unto death.^d And such a conscience have many amongst ourselves: it would be clamorous if they were to commit some flagrant enormity; while it bears no testimony at all against secret lusts, or against any evils which are sanctioned by an ungodly world.

^a Rev. xx. 12.

^c Matt. xiv. 9.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 2.

^d Matt. xxvii. 3—6, 20.

With some also there is an *erroneous* conscience. St. Paul "thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus,"^c and would have stood condemned in his own mind, if he had not laboured to the uttermost to extirpate the Christian name. And our Lord has told us that many would "think they did God service by killing" his faithful followers.^f Doubtless there are many who, both in civil and religious actions, are instigated by (what we may call) a good principle, while yet a clearer view of their duty would represent those actions in a very different light.

There is also with many a *scrupulous* conscience. They both do, and forbear many things from a sense of duty, when the things themselves are altogether indifferent in the sight of God. Thus it was with those who were afraid to eat meats that had been offered to idols, or who observed the times and seasons that had been prescribed in the Mosaic law.^g Superstition indeed is less common in this age: yet wherever the mind is tinctured with it, there will arise many occasions of condemnation or acquittal in a man's own mind, when the sentence passed is altogether founded in an ignorance of Christian liberty, or Christian duty.

Hence it is evident that conscience may condemn when it ought to acquit, and acquit when it ought to condemn.]

Its sentence, however, is always just, when it accords with the holy scriptures

[The scriptures are an infallible standard, to which every thing may be referred, and by which its quality may be determined. In order therefore to ascertain whether the testimonies of conscience be just, we should try them by this touchstone. We should learn from the sacred volume what are the leading features of conversion; what is essential to the Christian character; and what, though wrong in itself, will consist with real integrity. When we have thus attained an adequate knowledge of the *rule* of duty, and our conscience judges by that rule in estimating our conduct, then may we safely acquiesce in its determinations, and conclude it to be right, whether it acquit or condemn.

There is, however, and ever must be, more credit due to its sentence when it condemns, than when it acquits, because, in condemning, it may have respect to any single act, and found its sentence on that, without the smallest danger of mistake: but, in acquitting, it must comprehend the whole circle of a Christian's duty, and testify that, on the whole, there is no allowed deviation from it. Here therefore is great scope for error; insomuch that St. Paul himself, though he knew of no allowed evil in himself, would not be too confident respecting

^c Acts xxvi. 9.

^f John xvi. 2.

^g Rom. xiv. 2, 3, 5, 6.

his state; but committed himself to the judgment of a merciful and gracious God.^b]

To procure a just attention to its voice, we proceed to shew

II: The benefit and comfort of having its testimony in our favour

Nothing is more terrible than an accusing conscience. Its testimonies are

1. A source of present distress

[When God gives it a commission to scourge a man, it executes the office with great effect. How did it increase the troubles of Joseph's brethren;ⁱ and torture the soul of the unguarded Darius;^k and appal the impious Belshazzar, so that his knees smote one against the other!^l How did it make Felix tremble on the seat of judgment!^m and Judas actually to become his own executioner!ⁿ When it operates with a just and salutary influence, it will force the most obdurate to cry out with anguish,^o and the most confident to weep with great bitterness.^p

Many amongst ourselves perhaps have felt its stings, till we have groaned in our spirit, and even "howled upon our bed," anticipating, and almost tasting, the bitterness of hell itself.^q]

2. A pledge of eternal misery

[When conscience is enlightened, it sees innumerable abominations in the heart: and when sanctified, it feels an utter abhorrence of what it does see. But yet "God is greater than our hearts" both in respect of penetration to discover sin, and of holiness to hate it. He "knoweth all things" that have been done amiss, and *that* too, with all the particular aggravations that have attended every omission of duty, and every commission of iniquity. Not our actions only, but our very thoughts, are "sealed up in his bag," to be brought forward against us at the last day.^r The present testimonies of conscience are a previous and preliminary sentence, declaring now upon few and partial grounds, what God himself will hereafter declare on a complete review of our whole lives.

We say not indeed that there is no room for repentance: God forbid: the accusations of conscience are the voice of God within us, calling us to repentance: and the most guilty

^b 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

ⁱ Gen. xlvi. 21.

^k Dan. vi. 18—20.

^l Dan. v. 6.

^m Acts xxiv. 25.

ⁿ Matt. xxvii. 5.

^o Acts ii. 37. & xvi. 29, 30. ^p Luke xxii. 62.

^q Heb. x. 27.

^r Job xiv. 17.

conscience that ever tormented the soul of man, may in an instant be purged by the blood of Jesus:^s but if conscience summon us to its bar, as God summoned Adam and Cain to answer for their conduct,^t its decisions shall be ratified in the day of judgment, unless they be reversed through penitence and faith in Christ: what it “binds on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and what it looses on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”]

Nothing, on the other hand, is a richer blessing than a good conscience: its testimonies are

1. A source of unspeakable comfort

[St. Paul tells us that he found this to be a well-spring of happiness within him; “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,”^u Indeed, such a testimony is a continual feast to every one that enjoys it. Having an inward witness of our own sincerity, we may “assure our hearts before God,”^v we may “have boldness of access to him with confidence,”^w we may “ask of him what we will, and it shall be done unto us.”^x Such a testimony inspires a “confidence towards God” in every thing that relates to our present or future welfare; it fills the soul with a “peace that passeth all understanding,” “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified.” How desirable then is it to be able *now* to appeal to God, like Job, “Thou knowest that I am not wicked;”^y or with Peter, “Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!”^z And how blessed to say with Hezekiah *in a dying hour*, “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight!”^c]

2. An earnest of eternal happiness

[The witness of our conscience is, in fact, the witness of the Spirit of God:^d for it is the result of *a divine illumination*, whereby we discern the agreement of our experience with the word of God, and of *a divine communication*, rendering that agreement an occasion of joyful confidence. What then can this be but a foretaste of that bliss which shall be consummated in heaven? In this view these divine communications may be considered as “the first-fruits of the Spirit,” and “the earnest of the Spirit;” because they are, as it were, the beginnings of

^s Heb. x. 22. and 1 John. i. 7.

^t Gen. iii. 9. and iv. 9, 10.

^u 2 Cor. i. 12.

^x Ver. 19.

^y Eph. iii. 12.

^z Ver. 22.

^a Job x. 7.

^b John xxi. 17.

^c Isaiah xxxviii. 3.

^d Some think these are two distinct witnesses: but perhaps *this* is the more just view of the matter. See *Skel.* on Rom. viii. 16.

heaven in the soul, and they assure to us a complete and everlasting possession of it. Even in the day of judgment itself this holy confidence will remain:^e they who possess it now, will go forth with joy to meet the bridegroom; "they will stand before him with great boldness;"^f and, assured of their relation to him, will exclaim, "This God is our God for ever and ever."]

INFER

1. How careful should we be in every part of our conduct!

[Every thing we do is written in the book of God's remembrance; and our own consciences will hereafter, if not now, attest the truth of God's record. How anxious then should we be, that every day and every hour should record something good, rather than what will distress us in the day of judgment. Let us then beg of God to "put truth in our inward parts;" let us exercise ourselves day and night to keep a "conscience void of offence both towards God and man;"^g and let us say with Job, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live."^h]

2. How attentive should we be to the voice of conscience!

[Conscience, if we would listen to it, would tell us many plain and wholesome truths.ⁱ If we would submit to its reproofs, it would keep us from much evil, and lead us safely to heaven. Let none of us then stifle it, or bribe it, or despise it: but let us rather get it well informed, and cherish with care its salutary admonitions. Let us carefully conform ourselves to its dictates,^k and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged of the Lord."^l]

3. How thankfully should we bathe in the fountain of Christ's blood!

[There is not a day or an hour wherein conscience does not contract some defilement: nor is there a probability of pacifying it, but by continual applications to "the blood of sprinkling." Let us then rejoice that there is "a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness;" and let it be our care day and night to cleanse ourselves in it from every fresh contracted stain. If we neglect this, "our mind and conscience will be defiled;"^m but if we "abide in him, we shall have confidence in expectation of his appearance; nor shall we be ashamed before him at his coming."ⁿ]

^e 1 John iv. 17.

^f Wisd. v. 1.

^g Acts xxiv. 16.

^h Job xxvii. 6.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 15.

^k Ac's xxiii. 1.

^l 1 Cor. xi. 31.

^m Tit. i. 15.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 28.

CCCCXIX. AGAINST A DISPOSITION TO RELINQUISH THE LORD'S SERVICE.

Luke ix. 62. *Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

SO infinitely important is the service of God, that nothing can ever justify the withdrawing of ourselves from it, or the relaxing of our diligence in the discharge of our proper office—However innocent any earthly employment may be, yea, however decorous, or even necessary, in its place, it must give way to the more urgent calls of our duty to God—Of this our Lord constantly warned his hearers, in order that they might fully count the cost before they became his followers—His answers to three different persons upon this subject are worthy of our particular attention—To the first, who *voluntarily tendered to him his services*, he replied, that he must expect no worldly advantages in following him, but rather lay his account to meet with poverty and disgrace—In his address to the second, *whom he had enjoined to follow him*, and who wished to defer his obedience till he should have performed the last offices for his deceased father, our Lord required him to leave those offices to others, who were not occupied in higher pursuits, and instantly to comply with the direction given him; because *nothing, however proper in itself, should interfere with the execution of a positive command*—To the last, he gave this caution; That since his earthly relatives would most probably prove a snare to him under his present circumstances, he must make up his mind to forsake all for him; for that a wavering mind would unfit him both for the service of God on earth, and the enjoyment of God in heaven—

The request of this last person seems to have brought to our Lord's mind the circumstances of Elisha, when he was called to serve Elijah: and it is to Elisha's occupation that our Lord alludes in the answer he gave him—

From his words we may deduce two important observations

I. When we engage in God's service, we should determine, through grace, to continue in it

When we "put our hand to the plough" we engage in God's service

[It is obvious that, as God's creatures, and more particularly as redeemed by the blood of his dear Son, we are bound to serve and obey him—Now the obedience which he requires, is, that we renounce the world, and mortify sin, and yield up ourselves to him unfeignedly, and without reserve—And when we begin to make a profession of religion, we do, *in fact*, declare, that henceforth we will walk conformably to the example of Christ, and the precepts of his gospel—Our very putting of our hand to the plough is, as it were, a public declaration of our intention to prosecute and finish the work assigned us by our divine Master—]

But it is of no use to begin the Lord's work, if we do not resolutely adhere to it

[When first we turn to the Lord, we propose to ourselves two ends, namely, to glorify God, and to save our own souls: and while we continue faithful to our engagements, we find no reason to complain of disappointment—But the very instant we recede from our work, we proclaim, as it were, to all around us; I have tried religion, and found it but an empty name: I have served the Lord, and experienced him to be an hard Master: I have weighed the world and its services in a balance with God and his service; and I bear my testimony, that the world deserves our preference—By such conduct as this a person pulls down all that he has built: he brings incomparably more dishonour to God than ever he brought glory; and sinks his soul into a far deeper condemnation, than if he had never known the way of righteousness^b—As a man who should begin to plough, would render himself of no use, if he should relinquish his work as soon as he had proceeded to the end of a single furrow; so an apostate from religion renders his divine Master no service by a temporary obedience, but rather defeats, yea, most completely reverses, the ends proposed—]

Nor is it an open apostasy only from our holy profession that is so fatal to us: for

^b Ezek. xviii. 24. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

II. A disposition to recede from it manifests us to be unfit for the kingdom of God

Not he only who indignantly throws away the plough, but he who, while he still professes to do the Lord's work, is "looking back" with a wishful eye upon the world, is in the state here mentioned—He is unfit for

1. The kingdom of God on earth

[This is the primary import of the words of the text: nor can any thing be more clear than the truth contained in them—The service of Christ, whether in ministering the word to others, or in obeying it ourselves, requires stedfastness—We cannot adhere to Christ without opposing in many instances our carnal appetites, and worldly interests; as therefore a man, who, instead of attending to his plough, looks frequently behind him, would soon prove himself unfit for the service in which he was engaged, so he who should undertake to serve the Lord Christ, while his heart was yet set upon the world, would walk very unworthily of his profession, and soon shew himself unfit to execute the office assigned him—Like a bowl sent forth with violence, he might go steadily for a season; but he would ere long feel the influence of the corrupt bias that was within him, and, like "Demas, forsake the way of truth from love to this present evil world"—He must "be sincere, if he would be without offence until the day of Christ"—]

2. The kingdom of God in heaven

[If any person be disposed to look back, after having put his hand to the plough, he shews that he has not a supreme love to God, nor any real delight in holy ordinances, nor any resemblance to the characters of the saints of old—Look at Abraham, at Moses, at Paul, or any others recorded in the scripture; they left all for Christ, "counting every thing to be dung and dross for him," and "esteeming even the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of the world;" nor could even death, in its most formidable shapes, divert them from their purposes to serve and honour him—But how unlike to them are the irresolute and unstable! and how incapable of enjoying heaven even if they were there! Could they be happy in God when they do not supremely love him? Would they not rather dread his presence from a consciousness that their hearts were known to him?—Could they bear to spend an eternity in those employments for which they have no relish? would not their exercises be

an irksome task, and an intolerable burthen?—Could they have sweet communion with the glorified saints when they differ so widely from them? Would they not rather be so condemned in their consciences as even to wish themselves out of their society?—Surely a wavering professor of religion is alike unfit for the church militant, and the church triumphant—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who never put their hands to the plough

[How many are there who never set themselves in earnest to do the will of God, or even take pains to enquire what the will of God is!—But such will comfort themselves with the reflection, that they are neither hypocrites nor apostates—Alas! how poor a consolation is this.—Be it so; you have never made any profession of religion at all: but is that a ground of satisfaction and boasting? What must you say, but this? “Here is one, who has cast off all allegiance to his Maker, and lives without God in the world”—Ah! glory not in such a distinction as this: for, whoever ye be, God has assigned you a work to do, and will call you to give an account of your talent: and if you have hid it in a napkin, he will “cast you, as an unprofitable servant, into outer darkness”—May God open your eyes, and interest you in his service ere it be too late!—]

2. To those who, having put their hands to the plough, are disposed to look back

[We are apt to think lightly of secret declensions if we do not openly apostatize from the truth—But what was it that rendered Lot's wife such an object of God's displeasure? Did she go back to Sodom, or refuse to proceed with the angel to the destined place of safety? No; she *looked* back, and thereby shewed that her heart was not thoroughly weaned from the things which she had left behind: and on this account it was, that she was instantly transformed into a pillar of salt, and made a monument of God's wrath and indignation to all succeeding ages^d—To impress this instructive lesson on our minds, our Lord bids us “remember Lot's wife:”^e and it will be well to bear her ever in our minds, since, if we turn back, it will be unto perdition;^f and our last end will be worse than the beginning^g—We must endure to the end if ever we would be saved^h]—

3. To those who are determined, through grace, to persevere in their work.

^d Gen. xix. 26.

^e Luke xvii. 32.

^f Heb. x. 38, 39.

^g 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^h Matt. xxiv. 13.

[Doubtless the work will often prove heavy and fatiguing—But God has promised “ grace sufficient for us”—And the more we labour, the greater our rewardⁱ—Yea, the very work itself is a source of much peace and joy,^k and wonderfully conduces to fit us both for this world and the next—Who will make so distinguished a preacher of Christ, or will so adorn his Christian profession, as he who is altogether dead to the world? And who is so fit to join the saints above, as he who already emulates them in their love to God, and their delight in holy exercises?—Go on then, “ forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before;”^l and soon you shall both “ rest from your labours,” and “ enter into the joy of your Lord”—]

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^k Isaiah. xxxii. 17.

^l Phil. iii. 13, 14.

CCCCXX. THE MEANS OF SECURITY FROM SATAN'S MALICE.

Luke xxii. 31, 32. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*

THE agency, or even the existence, of evil spirits is scarcely credited amongst us—

But there is nothing more certain than that they exist, and act in the world—

To conflict with them constitutes a principal part of the Christian's warfare^a—

And to be aware of their devices is no inconsiderable attainment in Christian knowledge^b—

There is however a Being who is able to counteract their agency—

Of this we have a proof in the history before us—

Satan, the prince of the devils, meditated the destruction of Peter—

Our Lord with affection and earnestness warned Peter of his designs—

And, by his own intercession, secured him against his assaults

^a Eph. vi. 12.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 11.

I. The malice of Satan

Satan is the great adversary of mankind

[He was once as bright a morning star as any in heaven—
But he rebelled against the Most High, and incurred his displeasure^c—

Full of hatred against God, he sought to efface his image from our first parents—

Through subtilty he prevailed to the destruction of them and us^d—

Nor does he cease to assault those who through grace are restored—]

He desires to agitate and distress them

[This is evidently implied in the expression in the text—

He has various ways of effecting his purpose—

He may harass us with temptations and persecutions—

He may perplex us by artful insinuations and suggestions—

His efforts were exerted against all the apostles^e—

But the more eminent any are, the more they are hated by him—

Peter was distinguished for his knowledge and intrepidity^f—

Yea, he had had a peculiar honour conferred on him^g—

On this account Satan's malice raged against him more especially—]

But his ultimate end is to prove them hypocrites, or to make them apostates

[This was evidently his design in assaulting Job^h—

And in asking permission to try the disciplesⁱ—

Nor would he leave one faithful person upon earth—

“As a roaring lion he seeks to devour” all—

He can do nothing indeed but by divine permission^k—

But if suffered to fulfil all his will, he would destroy every soul—

His influence on the herd of swine shews what he would do to men^l—

Not one vassal of his would escape the fate of Judas^m—]

^c 2 pet. ii. 4.

^d 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^e Ἐγνεστο.

^f Matt. xvi. 16.

^g Matt. xvi. 18.

^h Job. i. 9, 11, and ii. 5.

ⁱ Ἐγνεστο seems to imply a kind of challenge, as in the case of Job, wherein he undertook to prove them to be but chaff, if God would suffer him to make the trial.

^k He could not afflict Job more than God saw fit to suffer him: nor could he enter into the swine without our Saviour's permission, Matt. viii. 31.

^l Matt. viii. 32. ^m Compare Luke xxii. 3, with Matt. xxvii. 5.

But God has not left his people without means of resistance

II. Our security

God has both armed his people for the combat, and given them a great Deliverer—

Faith is the grace whereby he enables us to maintain our stand

[It was by faith that we were translated from Satan's kingdom into Christ'sⁿ—

It is by that also that our daily warfare is to be carried on^o—

Yea, through that are we to attain our full and final salvation^p—

Faith is the shield whereby alone we can ward off the darts of Satan^q—

If that fail, we are exposed to the fiercest assaults of our enemy—

If we lose our hold of the promises, we shall be driven away as chaff—

We shall have no point around which to rally our scattered forces—

Whereas, if faith be strong, we shall hope even against hopeless—

And, though wounded, we shall return with fresh vigour to the combat—

Nor shall our great adversary be able to prevail against us^r—

Hence that earnest caution against unbelief^s—

And that express direction respecting the mode of opposing Satan^t—]

But the intercession of Christ is necessary to uphold our faith

[Peter's faith would have failed utterly if he had been left to himself—

But through the intercession of Christ he was preserved—

Thus we also should "make shipwreck of our faith"—

But our prevailing Advocate pleads for us also^u—

As our High-Priest he bears us on his breast-plate before the throne^v—

He obtains for us fresh supplies of the Spirit—

In this way he, who has been the author of our faith, will also be the finisher^w

ⁿ Gal. iii. 26.

^o 2 Cor. i. 24.

^p 1 Pet. i. 5.

^q Eph. vi. 16.

^r Rom. iv. 18, 20.

^s Rom. x. 11.

^t Heb. iii. 12.

^u 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^x John xvii. 26.

^v Exod. xxviii. 29.

^z Heb. xii. 2.

Hence the encouragement given us to rely on the intercession of Christ^a—

Hence the encouragement given us to regard it under every backsliding^b—

Hence the encouragement given us to rest assured of Christ's power to save^c]—

INFER

1. What need have we to be ever on our guard!

[Perhaps at this moment Satan may be desiring to sift us—

And what if God should give us up into his hands?—

If suffered to exert his strength, he could soon dissipate whatever is good in us—

Nor should our past zeal in God's service remove our apprehensions—

That would rather provoke Satan to more activity against us—

Let us then “not be high-minded but fear”—

Let us follow the salutary advice which our Lord has given us^d—

Let us plead with fervour those important petitions—

At the same time let us “put on the whole armour of God”—

And prepare, as God has taught us, for the assaults of our enemy^e]—

2. What a mercy is it to have an interest in Christ!

[They who know not Christ are wholly under the power of Satan^g—

But they who are Christ's have a watchful and almighty guardian—

Our Lord provided for Peter's safety, before Peter even knew his danger—

Thus “will he keep the feet of all his saints”—

He will suffer none of them to be plucked out of his hand^h—

If he permit Satan to sift them, it shall be only for the removing of their chaffi—

He has pledged his word for the security of the weakest of his people^k—

Let us therefore commit ourselves entirely into his hands—

Let us beg him to remember our unworthy names in his intercessions—

And to deal with us as with Joshua of old^l]—

^a Rom. viii. 34.

^b 1 John ii. 1.

^c Heb. vii. 25.

^d Matt. xxvi. 41.

^e Matt. vi. 13.

^f Eph. vi. 13—18.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^h John x. 28.

ⁱ Compare 2 Cor. xiii. 7, with Heb xii. 10, 11.

^k Amos ix. 9.

^l Zech. iii. 2—4.

CCCCXXI. THE EVIL OF BACKSLIDING.

Jer. ii. 19. Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God.

SIN and misery are very nearly connected; and the nearer we are to God by relation or profession, the more immediately will our transgressions be followed by tokens of his displeasure. The Israelites were God's chosen people; yet, while the Amorites, and other idolatrous nations, were left to fill up the measure of their iniquities, before they were visited according to their deserts, the Jews, especially while journeying through the wilderness, were speedily chastened for their iniquities, and made to feel the evil and bitterness of sin. Thus, only in a more secret and silent manner, does God now punish the backslidings of his people; nor does he notice only the grosser violations of his law, but the more hidden abominations of the heart, and secret declensions from the spiritual life. Indeed, he makes sin its own punishment, according to what is written in the text: to elucidate which, we shall show

I. In what respects our own backslidings correct us

It is not unfrequently that, even in our temporal concerns, we suffer loss by relaxing our diligence in spiritual duties: but it is invariably found, that backslidings from God are attended with very painful consequences

1. They wound our conscience.

[Conscience, if duly attended to, is a faithful monitor, and will upbraid us for declensions, however secret, and transgressions, however small: and when it testifies of wilful deliberate sin, when it summons us into the divine presence, and accuses us before God, it will make a *Felix* tremble, and a *Judas* abhor his very existence. This is a correction, which, as no enlightened person would willingly endure, so neither, till he return to God, or have his "conscience seared as with an hot iron," can he hope to escape.]

2. They intercept our views of God

[God is exceeding gracious to those who walk circumspectly before him; but he has warned us that, "if we forsake

him, he will forsake us.”^a This his people of old experienced to their cost, as the prophet told them; “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”^b And is this a slight correction? Let the cries, and terrors of persons under dereliction,^c be to us a beacon, for our effectual admonition.]

3. They indispose us for spiritual exercises and enjoyments

[While we maintain close fellowship with God, our duties are a source of the sublimest happiness: but when we decline from his ways, the whole work of religion becomes a burthen. Have we neglected prayer for a season, or been inattentive in it to the frame of our minds? how irksome a task is it to approach our God! the most glorious of all privileges is turned into a detested rite, to which we are goaded by a guilty conscience. The same indisposition instantly extends itself to every other office of religion; so that the visiting of the sick, the conversing on spiritual subjects, the reading of the holy scriptures, and indeed the whole life of religion is bereft of vital energy, and degenerates into an empty and unproductive form. What an awful punishment is this!]

4. They lay us open to the incursions of sin and Satan

[Righteousness is, as it were, a breast-plate that guards our vitals, and proves an armour on the right hand and on the left;^d but unwatchfulness deprives the soul of its defence, and exposes us to the envenomed darts of our great adversary. If we have secretly declined from God, the temptations, which once were easily overcome, have a deep and lasting effect: our spirits are soon ruffled; our evil passions are soon awakened; and, if God interpose not for our recovery, we shall soon “return with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow to the wallowing in the mire.” Sin, of any kind, makes a breach in the soul, which, if not stopped at first, will widen, till our desolation is inevitable, and our ruin final.]

Additional light will be reflected on this subject, while we consider

II. The evil and bitterness of a backslidden state

The sinfulness of an ignorant and carnal state, heinous as it is, is by no means comparable to the guilt of backsliding from God. To view backslidings in their real malignity we must remember that they involve in them

^a 2 Chron. xv. 2.

^b Isaiah lix. 2.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 1—9. & lxxxviii. 3—16. ^d Eph. vi. 14. Cor. vi. 7.

1. A violation of the most solemn engagements

[The man, who professes to be a follower of Christ, pledges himself by that very profession to devote himself entirely to the service of his God: he declares, as it were, his approbation of his baptismal covenant, and his determination through grace to adhere to it in all things. But, in proportion as he yields to open sin or secret declensions, i.e. revokes all his promises, and renounces all his expectations of the divine favour. How vile, and how desperate, must such a conduct be in the eyes of God!]

2. A contempt of the richest mercies

[While we serve God aright, we never find him backward to recompense our worthless endeavours: the more diligently we have sought him, the more abundantly has he enriched us with grace and peace. When therefore we forsake him, we say, in fact, that we despise his mercies, and prefer the pleasures of sin before any of the pleasures which he can afford us. What base ingratitude, what daring insolence is this!]

3. A vindication of God's open and avowed enemies

[Practical piety condemns the world; but impiety, as far as it extends, proclaims to all, that God is not worthy to be loved and served. The backslider goes further still; and says to all around him, I have tried God, and found him to be "a wilderness to his people:"^e I once was weak enough to think that the more religious I was, the more happy I should be: but I was disappointed in my hopes; and now revert to my former ways, that all may know the superior happiness, which, in my opinion at least, is to be enjoyed in freedom from restraints, and in the gratifications of time and sense. Alas! on what a precipice does the backslider stand! and, what an account will he have to give at last, if he do not instantly return to God in penitence and faith!]

Nor is the *bitterness* of such a state easy to be appreciated

[If we would "know and see" what a "bitter thing" it is to forsake the Lord, let us consult the declarations of God, and the experience of his ancient people. What "broken bones" did the fall of David occasion!^f And where was the blessedness which the Galatian church had once enjoyed, when, through the influence of their false teachers, they had declined from the simplicity of the gospel?^g Indeed, let any man consult the records of his own conscience, and he will soon perceive, that, as there is no happiness to be compared with a state of nearness to God, so there is no misery like that which a sense of his departure from us will occasion. As for

the bitterness of it to apostates in the day of judgment, that cannot be described; and we pray God we may never be left to feel and endure it. But let us study to "know and see" it in its true light, that we may be stirred up by the consideration of it to "cleave unto our God with full purpose of heart."]

CCCCXXII. THE DANGER OF BACKSLIDING.

Prov. xiv. 14. *The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and the good man shall be satisfied from himself.*

THOUGH God does not select those as objects of his mercy, who are most diligent in external duties, yet he increases his favours to those whom he has chosen, in proportion as they themselves are earnest in improving what he has already bestowed upon them. In the dispensations of his providence it is generally found, that "the diligent hand maketh rich;" but in the dispensations of his grace, this seems to be an unalterable rule of his procedure: "his ways with respect to these things are equal;" "whatsoever a man sows, that he may assuredly expect to reap"—To this effect are the declarations before us; in which we may observe

I. The danger of backsliding

Open apostasy is confessedly a certain road to destruction; but we may also perish by indulging the more specious, and equally dangerous habit of secret declension. Not that every variation in our frame constitutes us backsliders in heart; (for who then could be saved?) but

We come under this description

When we are habitually remiss in secret duties

[It is possible we may once have run well, and enjoyed much blessedness in the service of our God; and yet have been so hindered in our course, as to have relapsed into a state of coldness and formality.^a The word, which was once precious, may have lost its savour; and prayer, which was once delightful, may have become an irksome task. Both public and private ordinances may have degenerated into an empty form, in

^a Gal. i. 6. and v. 7. and iv. 15.

which God is not enjoyed, nor is any blessing received—Where this is the case the person must surely be denominated a “backslider in heart”—]

When we habitually indulge any secret lusts

[Whatever attainments a man may have made in religion, if his heart be not whole with God, he will sooner or later decline; and that which was his besetting sin in his state of ignorance, will regain its ascendancy, and (as far at least as relates to its inward workings) recover its dominion over him. He may still, for his profession sake, restrain sin, in a measure, as to its outward exercise, while yet its inward power is unsubdued. Was he naturally addicted to pride, envy, malice, covetousness, lewdness, or any other sin? if he *allow* it to return upon him after he has been once purged from it,^b if he be averse to have the evil of it pointed out to him, if he justify it or cover his fault with excuses, instead of endeavouring earnestly to amend it, he certainly is a backslider in heart—]

In either of these states we are exposed to the most imminent danger

[There are a variety of ways in which God will punish sin, but none so terrible as that specified in the words before us—if God were to fill the blackslider with acute and long-continued pain, or visit him with some other temporal affliction, it might work for good, and bring him to consideration and repentance: but if he give him up to his own heart's lusts, and leave him to be “filled with his own ways,” nothing but a certain and aggravated condemnation can ensue. Was he far from God? he will be farther still: was he addicted to any sin? he will be more and more enslaved by it: nor can there be a doubt, but that God *will* give us up to this judgment, if we “leave off to behave ourselves wisely,” and return to the indulgence of wilful neglects and secret sins^c— — —]

But we shall see a strong additional motive to persevere, if we consider

II. The benefit of maintaining stedfastness in religion

The “good man” is here put in contrast with the backslider

[As every occasional declension does not denominate a man a wilful backslider, so neither does every transient inclination to virtue denominate a man good. To be truly good, he must set out well, and “hold on his way,” causing his “light to shine more and more unto the perfect day”^d—]

^b 2 Pet. i. 9. and ii. 20. Gal. iv. 16.

^c Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Deut. xxxii. 15, 18, 19, 20. Prov. i. 30, 31.

^d Prov. iv. 18.

Such an one shall find much satisfaction both in and from his way:

He shall have the comfort of seeing that he is advancing in religion

[The testimony of a good conscience is one of the richest comforts we can enjoy.^e Hezekiah pleaded it before God in a dying hour, not indeed as a ground of justification before him, but as a ground whereon he might hope for some favourable indulgence with respect to the continuance of this present life^f —And Paul, in the near prospect of the eternal world, found it a source of unutterable joy.^g Now this satisfaction every upright soul shall enjoy. If he cannot distinctly see the progressive steps of his advancement from day to day, he shall have a testimony in his own conscience that he is *on the whole* advancing: he shall feel himself more and more fixed in his “purpose to cleave unto the Lord,” and increasingly desirous of approving himself faithful to his God and Saviour—]

He shall also enjoy more abundant manifestations of God’s love

[God will not leave his people without witness that he is pleased with their endeavours to serve and honour him. “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” If he behold any persons striving to please him, “he will love them, and come unto them, and sup with them, and manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world;”^h and the more diligent he sees them in doing his will, the more richly will he impart to them the tokens of his love, and the more abundantly communicate to them the blessings of grace and peaceⁱ—]

His prospects, moreover, of the eternal world shall be more bright and glorious.

[To many does God vouchsafe, as to Moses from mount Pisgah, delightful prospects of the heavenly Canaan. He draws aside the veil, and suffers them to enter into the holy of holies, that they may behold his glory, and receive a foretaste of the blessedness which they shall one day enjoy in his presence. But on whom are these special favours bestowed? on the slothful, the careless, the inconstant? No. It is “the faithful man that shall abound with these blessings;” it is “him that rejoiceth in working righteousness, that the Lord will meet” in this intimate and endearing manner^k—]

^e 2 Cor. i. 12.

^f 2 Kings xx. 2, 3.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

^h John xiv. 21—23. Rev. iii. 20.

ⁱ Isaiah xxxii. 17.

^k Prov. xxviii. 20. Isaiah xxxiii. 14—17. and lxiv. 5.

INFER

1. How much more ready is God to shew mercy than to execute his judgments!

[Had God been extreme to mark what is done amiss, who is there amongst us, whom he would not often have abandoned in an hour of secret declension? But he is full of compassion; and "judgment is his strange work," to which he is greatly averse. At this very moment does he follow the backslider with the most earnest invitations, and most gracious promises, saying, "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely."¹ Let us thankfully acknowledge his long-suffering and forbearance; and seek that happiness in the service of our God, which we shall in vain look for in any deviations from the path of duty—]

2. What need have we to watch over our own hearts!

[We are bidden to "keep our hearts with all diligence, because out of them are the issues of life and death;"^m and indeed we have need to guard them well, because they are so "bent to backslide from God." It will be rarely, if ever, found, that the watchful Christian is left to fall into any gross sin. Men decline from God in secret, before he withdraws from them his restraining grace: they have chosen some evil "way of their own," and deliberately followed it in their hearts, before God leaves them to be "filled with it." If then we would not be swept away with a deluge of iniquity, let us be careful to stop the breach at first; for, if left a little time, it will widen, till it defies our utmost exertions. The present satisfaction, as well as the future salvation, of our souls depends on a stedfast walk with God. Let us then "hold fast the profession of our faith, and the practice of our duty, without wavering:" and "let us look to ourselves that we lose not the things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward"ⁿ—]

¹ Jer. iii. 22. Hos. xiv. 4.

^m Prov. iv. 23.

ⁿ 2 John 8.

CCCCXXIII. GROWTH IN GRACE THE BEST PRESERVATIVE FROM APOSTASY.

2 Pet. iii. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness: But*

grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

HOWEVER averse men are to receive warnings and exhortations from each other, there is, in reality, no greater proof of affection, than the administering of faithful cautions and salutary advice, to those whom we love. It is evident how much St. Peter's mind was warmed with affection towards his brethren, since he, no less than four times in this short chapter, addresses them by that endearing term, "Beloved." And how did he testify his love, but by guarding them against the dangers to which they were exposed, and by prescribing to them the most effectual means of deliverance and safety?

Let his word then be thankfully received by us, while we consider

I. His caution against apostasy

[The wicked will take occasion from God's forbearance to question his remunerative justice^a— — — And even the godly need to be on their guard against the influence of this delusion^b— — — Certain it is, that they are liable to fall from their own stedfastness; and that, without the greatest vigilance, they will do so^c— — — But they "know" the certainty and awfulness of the day of judgment, and should therefore be afraid of meeting it unprepared—It will *then* be too late to rectify their "errors," or repent of their instability^d—And this consideration should make them doubly cautious against every occasion of falling^e]—

II. His direction for preventing it

The Christian should seek to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ"

[None, who have received grace, will be satisfied with the measure they have received; but they will be seeking to attain more and more.^f Nor will any, who know Christ, think they "know any thing yet as they ought to know:" they will

^a Ver. 3, 4. with Eccl. viii. 11. ^b Eph. iv. 14. 2 Pet. ii. 18.

^c 1 Tim. i. 19. 2 Tim. ii. 18. Matt. xxiv. 12. 1 Cor. ix. 27. Whether God will restore his elect, is a distinct question, that, if introduced in this place, might uphold a system, but would weaken the force of the Apostle's caution.

^d Matt. xxv. 11—13.

^e This argument is *thrice* urged; ver. 11, 14, 17.

^f Phil. iii. 12—14.

perceive that there are in him “treasures of knowledge,” which they have never explored,^g and which to all eternity will be progressively opening to their view.

Hence the Christian’s duty is to be continually advancing in every part of the divine life; and to “make his profiting appear unto all men.”]

This will be his best, his only, preservative against apostasy

[Painting or statuary admit of intermissions in labour: such work, idly for a season, may be resumed without any increased difficulty: but, in religion, every intermission is a positive injury: if the work proceed not, it declines: it always waxes or wanes. Now every declension weakens the vital principle within us, restores to activity our dormant corruptions, exposes us to the assaults of our great adversary, and provokes God to withdraw his accustomed aid: consequently, our downfall begun, will, if not prevented by sovereign grace, be speedy, gradual, and certain. On the other hand, a progress in grace confirms every good habit, fastens round us the whole armour of God, keeps our enemy at a distance, and secures to us the continued protection of heaven. Go on adding to your grace, says, God, “and you shall never fall.”^h]

ADVICE

1. Reflect much and often on the day of judgment

[Through a forgetfulness of that day we become the sport of every temptation: but if we would frequently endeavour to realize the strictness of the scrutiny, and the severity of the judgment, which will then take place, we should be more fortified against error in principle, or evil in practice. We must expect our Lord’s coming, if we would be found ready on his arrival.ⁱ—]

2. Be diligent in the use of all the means of grace

[It is in vain to hope that we shall grow in grace or knowledge, if we do not use the means which God has appointed. But, if we watch unto prayer, and conscientiously devote ourselves to him, he will “bless us with all spiritual blessings;” “our faith and love shall grow exceedingly;” our “hope shall abound through the power of the Holy Ghost,” and, from being “babes,” we shall become “children, young men, and fathers in Christ;”^k and, having attained at last “the measure of the full stature of Christ,”^l we shall “enter into his joy,” and be partakers of his glory for evermore.]

^g Col. ii. 3. St. Paul, after preaching Christ for twenty years, yet sought above all things to “know him.” Phil. iii. 8, 10.

^h 2 Pet. i. 5, 10, 11.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 1, and 1 John ii. 12—14.

ⁱ Matt. xxiv. 42—44.

^l Eph. iv. 13.

EXHORTATIONS.

CCCCXXIV. THE NEED OF ATTENDING TO GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATIONS.

Prov. i. 20—31. *Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*

TO expostulate with men respecting their evil ways, to point out the consequences of persisting in them, to urge the necessity of a speedy and thorough conversion to God, and to enforce the address with affectionate intreaties and encouraging assurances, is stigmatized as the effervescence of an heated imagination, the offspring of a weak enthusiastic mind—But, however it be foolishness with men, it is wisdom in the sight of God—No expostulations, intreaties, promises, or threatenings can be delivered with greater energy or affection than those in the text; yet God calls them the voice, not of folly and enthusiasm, but of “wisdom;” and, whatever we may think of them, they will be found to be “the words of truth and soberness”—We are now “in the chief place of

concourse," and it is wisdom itself, or God under the name of Wisdom, that now addresses us—The substance of the address may be comprehended under two general observations

I. To those who receive his invitations, God will be exceeding gracious

Nothing can be more tender than the expostulation before us

[The words are addressed not merely to the "simple," but to those who "love simplicity;" not only to the ignorant, but to them that "hate knowledge;" not only to those who are destitute of religion, but who "delight to scoff" at it—What can we suppose that God should say to such daring transgressors? What, but to denounce the heaviest judgments? But "he is God and not man," and therefore he speaks to them as God, in terms of inconceivable love and mercy; "How long will ye love your evil and destructive ways?" Will not "the past time suffice to have followed" them? Have they been so pleasant or profitable that ye will forego all the happiness of heaven for them? or, if ye intend to turn away from them, have ye fixed the period of your conversion? "How long" do you intend to persist? Till the time of sickness, and the hour of death? Or till some more convenient season? Ah! "turn you at my reproof;" let the words of a Father and a Friend, prevail with you: do not attempt to justify your actions; or to extenuate your guilt: you see clearly enough that your conduct is indefensible: turn, turn from it without delay—]

The promises, with which the expostulation is enforced, add greatly to its weight

[A consciousness both of weakness and of ignorance often contributes to keep men under the power of their sins—A thought arises in their minds, "I know not how to turn; I know not how to obtain either the pardon of my sins, or victory over my lusts"—But God obviates at once all such discouraging reflections—He says in effect, "Are your corruptions insuperable by any efforts of your own? 'I will pour out my Spirit' to sanctify you throughout. Are you at a loss how to obtain my favour? 'I will make known to you the words of life;' I will reveal my Son in your heart; I will shew you the efficacy of his atonement, and make you wise unto salvation through faith in him.'—Thus does he silence their objections, and dissipate their fears—"Behold," what manner of love is this! surely we should not hear of it but with wonder; we should not receive its overtures, but with grateful adoration—]

But "God will not always strive with man"—On the contrary

II. They, who despise his invitations, shall be given up to final impenitence and ruin

The contempt too generally poured upon the mercy of God, is awful in the extreme

[One would suppose that such invitations and promises could not fail of producing the desired effect. But, alas! the reception they meet with is such as God himself represents it: men "refuse to obey his calls; when he stretches out his hands to them with parental tenderness and importunate intreaties, they will not regard him; they set at nought his counsel; they despise his reproof; they hate even to hear of their duty, and determine, whatever be the consequence, that they will not perform it"—The zeal and earnestness of his ministers are made a subject of profane ridicule; and the dictates of Wisdom are laughed at as the effusions of folly and fanaticism—We appeal to the consciences of all respecting these things—Who that has made any observations on the world around him, or on what passes in his own heart, must not attest that these things are so? Yes; we are all guilty: "This has been our manner from our youth"—Some have been more open and notorious, and others more secret and reserved, in their oppositions to God's will; but all have opposed it, and, if divine grace have not slain our enmity, we are opposing it still: the deliberate sentiment of every unregenerate man is like theirs of old, "As for the word which thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee"^a]—]

But such conduct, if persisted in, will one day meet a suitable reward

[As God cannot be deceived, so neither will he be mocked: if he have a day of grace, so has he also a day of vengeance; and that day is hastening on apace—However secure the sinner may think himself, there is an hour of "desolation, and of consequent distress and anguish coming upon him"—Perhaps it may come in this life; on a dying bed he may be filled with terror and remorse; and though, like Judas, he may confess his sin, or, like Esau, pray for a revocation of his sentence, his prayers may be cast out, and God laugh at his calamity—Often does God threaten this, and often has he executed his threatening; "Go to your gods whom ye have

^a Jer. xliv. 16.

chosen," said he to his people of old; "let them deliver you; for I will deliver you no more"^b—So now does he often suggest to the mind of an awakened; but unconverted sinner, "What will the world do for you now? What will your pleasures, your riches, or your honours profit you in this day of my wrath? What do you think of the seed which you have been sowing, now you begin to reap the fruit thereof?—But if God deal not with us thus in this world, most assuredly he will in the world to come—That will indeed be an hour of distress and anguish when these despisers of mercy shall stand at the tribunal of their Judge: and oh! how will HE then "laugh at their calamity! how will he mock at all their fear" and terror! 'You would not believe my word: now see whether it be true or not? You would not be persuaded that I would ever vindicate my insulted Majesty: What do you think of that matter now? You despised me, and said, "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways!" You shall have your request: I will depart from thee; and thou too shalt depart from me: depart accursed into everlasting fire: and though you should pray to all eternity for a mitigation of your pain, you shall never have so much as a drop of water to cool your tongue'—

Would to God that men would realize these things, and be persuaded to believe that God is true! But whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, we must declare what God has spoken: and, however an ignorant world may deride it as folly, we will aver it to be the "counsel of true Wisdom," and the declaration of an unerring God—]

APPLICATION

1. Let all adore the divine goodness

[Which of us must not plead guilty to the charge of despising God? Which of us has not persevered in a course of disobedience to him in spite of all his messages of mercy; and *that* too, not for days merely, but for months and years?— Yet has God exercised forbearance towards us; and at this very instant renews to us his gracious invitations—Let us consider how many thousands have been cut off in their sins, while we are yet spared to hear the tidings of salvation: and "let the patience and long-suffering of God lead us to repentance"—Let us magnify him for such distinguished favours; and turn to him "to-day, while it is called to-day, lest he swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest"—]

2. Let all tremble at the divine justice

^b He has threatened it, Mic. iii. 4. Jer. ii. 27, 28. and he has executed it, Zech. vii. 11—13. Judg. x. 13, 14.

[Though God be so full of compassion, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live,” yet is he a just and sin-avenging God: “he will by no means clear the guilty”^c—He sometimes “repays the wicked to their face” even in this life; but there is a day which he has appointed for the full display of his own righteousness; a day, wherein he will render to every man according to his deeds; to those, who have sought for immortality, eternal life; but to the despisers of his truth, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish^d—Let us then get our minds impressed with this thought, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God:^e and let us instantly comply with his invitations here, that we may be partakers of his promises in a better world—]

^c Exod. xxxiv. 7.

^d Rom. ii. 6—9.

^e Heb. x. 31.

CCCCXXV. GOD EXPOSTULATING WITH SINNERS.

Ezek. xxxiii. 11. *Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

THE excuses, which men offer for not turning unto God, are, for the most part, reflections cast on God himself—One man deems his service unnecessary; another thinks it impracticable in his particular situation; another says, I can do nothing without grace, and if God do not bestow his grace upon me, how can I help myself?—Such was the disposition manifested by the Jews of old, when they were invited and commanded to repent: they complained, that it was to no purpose to repent, since they were already pining away under their transgressions; and that the promises of life, which were held forth to them in God’s name, were delusive, since God, so far from wishing to pardon them, had shewn a pleasure in executing his vengeance upon them^a—Against

^a This seems to be implied in ver. 10. as connected with the text.

such unrighteous accusations God vindicates himself by an oath, and by the most pressing and affectionate exhortation renews his calls to repentance—In the message which he sent by the Prophet to the Jews, we have his message to sinners of every age and nation: and in delivering it to you at this time we would call your attention to two things contained in it

I. A solemn oath

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord speaketh,” yea, sweareth; and, “because he can swear by no greater, he swears by himself,” even by his own life and immortal perfections —But what is it which Jehovah condescends to confirm in this solemn manner?

1. That he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner

[What? was this a matter so doubtful, that it was necessary to remove our doubts in such a way?—Methinks, we need no further proof of this than our own continuance in the land of the living—Should we, should any of us have been here, if God had taken pleasure in our death? Have we not provoked God in ten thousand instances to cut us off, and would he not long since have consigned us over to perdition, if he had not been slow to anger, and rich in mercy?——Would God moreover have given his only dear Son to die for us, and his blessed Spirit to convert and sanctify us, yea, would he wait so long to be gracious unto us, and, notwithstanding our obstinacy, follow us every day with invitations, intreaties, promises, and expostulations; would he act thus, I say, if he had pleasure in our death?——Surely it was not any uncertainty respecting the truth itself, but our backwardness to believe it, that gave occasion for such an astonishing vindication of it—]

2. That he has pleasure in the conversion and salvation of sinners

[This is not at all less obvious than the foregoing truth; and the same observations, which confirm the one, will establish the other also—But we may further refer both to existing facts, and most explicit declarations, in support of this assertion—We cannot conceive more atrocious guilt than that which David had contracted, guilt aggravated an hundred-fold by his past professions and experience—But no sooner did he acknowledge his transgression, than the prophet who had been commissioned to denounce the heaviest judgments against him, was inspired to reply, The Lord hath put away

thy sin, thou shalt not die^b—In what beautiful colours is the mercy of our God painted in the parable of the lost sheep, and the returning prodigal! Is it possible for words more fully to describe how much “he delighteth in mercy?”—Let us marvel then at the condescension of our God in confirming such declarations by an oath—Had he “sworn in his wrath that we should not enter into his rest,” we might easily have accounted for it; because, however merited such a judgment might be, he is never brought, but with extreme reluctance, to execute it—But to establish his character for mercy in such a way, was altogether superfluous, except for the more abundant display of his own goodness, and the richer consolation of our minds—]

That this testimony of God, respecting his own delight in mercy, may not fail of producing its proper effect on our minds, it is enforced by

II. An affectionate exhortation

Had we not already seen such condescension as almost exceeds our belief, we might well be filled with wonder at the further proofs of it which are exhibited in the text

The Creator and Judge of all stoops to use the language of entreaty towards perishing sinners

[He does not simply issue his command, but repeats it with all the tenderness and solicitude of the most affectionate parent—He sees with deep concern how “all like sheep are gone astray, every one to *his own way*:” one is wandering in the paths of open sensuality and profaneness; another has involved himself in the labyrinths of worldly care: another is pleasing himself with the idea that he belongs to the fold of God, while he has nothing but “the form of godliness without any of its power”—But God would have all return to him, to walk in *his ways*, and to enjoy his blessings—He longs to see the sensualist, the worldling, and the formal professor of religion, all truly and thoroughly awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, and all seeking after the salvation of their souls as the one thing needful—He would not that one of them should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live—Hence his earnestness in urging their immediate and effectual return—]

He further enforces his request with a most animated exhortation

[Sin and death are inseparably connected: there is no alternative but to flee from sin or perish for ever; we must *turn or die*—This is evidently implied in the expostulation which God uses; and the certainty of it is far more strongly marked, than if it had been asserted in the plainest terms—Let sinners then answer the question which God puts to them, Why will ye die? Is death, eternal death so light a matter, that ye will subject yourselves to it for the fleeting gratifications of sin? Is it a light thing “to fall into the hands of the living God,” and to have “both body and soul cast into hell” for ever?—Or is a life of godliness so painful, that the labours of it will not be repaid by all the felicity of heaven?—If we were to ask you, Whv will ye seek after God? Why will ye regard your souls? Why will ye forsake the beaten paths of sin, and walk in the unfrequented ways of righteousness? Your answers would be plain; the most ignorant might give such a reply, as not all the wisdom of man could gainsay or resist—But what will ye answer to the interrogaⁿtion in the text? And if you are constrained now, notwithstanding your habits of self-vindication, to acknowledge the folly and madness of your conduct, how much more will you be speechless in the day of judgment, when the enormity of such conduct will appear without any palliation or disguise!—Let not God then reason with you in vain: but turn from those ways, which you are not able to justify, or, with any shadow of propriety, to excuse—]

APPLICATION

1. To those who are now at length desirous of returning to God

[It is not from profaneness to morality, or from morality to an outward observance of religious duties, that God calls us; but from all sin whatever to a sound and thorough conversion—Be sure then that you do not mistake in a matter of such infinite importance; but turn to God in the ways which he has appointed—Go with penitence and contrition to the Lord Jesus, that you may be washed in the fountain of his blood: and pray to God for the influences of his Spirit, that you may be “sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit, and be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom”—Rest in nothing short of this, for it is not to this only that the promise of life is annexed; “you must be converted, and become as little children (simple, teachable, dependent, obedient in all things) if ever you would enter into the kingdom of heaven”—]

2. To those who are still determined to withstand the intreaties of God

[Go on in sin, till you have filled up the measure of your

iniquities: but remember, ye will not have to cast the blame on God in that day when your calamities shall come upon you—God has at this very hour testified with an oath, that it is his desire to save your souls; yea, he at this moment ex-postulates with you; and beseeches you to seek his face—Nor shall ye have to accuse your minister in that day—We are told indeed, in the very chapter before us, that the blood of those who perish, shall be required at the hands of negligent and unfaithful ministers:^e but, even though your blood were to be required at the hands of your minister, it would be no alleviation of your misery, since you also would die in your iniquity, and be condemned together with him—We hope, however, and are determined, God helping us, to be “pure from your blood:” we have warned you, and do warn you yet again, that you must *turn or die*; “if ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live”—Whatever others therefore may plead, *ye have*, and shall have, none but yourselves to blame: and it will be a bitter reflection in the day of judgment, to think, that “God called; and ye refused;” and that “Christ would often have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not”—May God prevent those reflections by giving you repentance unto life, for his dear Son’s sake: Amen, and Amen—]

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 7—9.

CCCCXXVI. THE WORK OF REDEMPTION A MOTIVE TO CONVERSION.

Isaiah xliv. 22. Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

IT is almost incredible that rational beings should ever be so stupid as to cut down a tree, and carve out of it the image of a man, and, after having roasted their food with a part of it, bow down to the residue as to a god—But it is yet more astonishing that Jehovah, after having been thus insulted, should invite the offenders to mercy, and urge them to accept it—Yet it is in this connexion that the text stands; and it may well be addressed to *us*; since, however free we be from such gross idolatry, we all have worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator—Let us then fix our attention upon

I. The invitation

Our defection from God is too manifest to need much proof—Shades of difference there may doubtless be between different individuals; but all have turned aside from God, and gone astray like sheep that are lost—But we are here invited to return to him

1. With penitence

[The example of the Prodigal is that which we ought to follow—The consideration of our departure from God should fill us with shame and sorrow, and our idolatrous attachment to the creature humble us in the dust—This is the direction which God himself has given us,^a and it is to such humiliation alone that his promises of acceptance are made^b]—

2. With faith

[We are not to come to God with a mind full of doubts and suspicions, but with a full persuasion of his readiness to receive us—To what purpose is it to put away our contempt of his authority, if we deny or question the riches of his grace? Our conviction of his love and mercy should be as strong as possible;^c and we should with the most confident assurance rely on the death of Christ as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for all our sins—]

3. With love

[God delights in a willing people; he would not have us regard him as a severe Master, but as a loving Father: instead of accounting his commandments grievous, we should consider his services as perfect freedom—Our disposition should be like that of Jesus when first he undertook our cause^d—Nor indeed can any thing but an unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service prove the truth of our repentance and the sincerity of our faith—]

The full import of this invitation will be seen by considering

II. The motive with which it is enforced

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who addresses to us the word of the text^e—Now if he had enforced his invitation with a threatening of everlasting punishment, it would have called for our most attentive regard: but the motive here urged has tenfold energy—It may be considered

^a Hos. xiv. 1, 2.

^b Job. xxxiii. 27.

^c Mark ix. 22, 23.

^d Ps. xl. 7, 8.

^e See ver. 2 h.

1. As a tie upon our gratitude

[The redemption of Israel from Egypt, though great, was not to be compared with that which is wrought for us by the blood of Christ—The obligations which we lie under exceed all computation—Well therefore may this stupendous mercy be urged as an inducement to return to God—Indeed, this motive, duly considered, could not fail of producing the desired effect—Suppose a prodigal, having left his father's house, and squandered away his substance, had been seized by his creditors and sold for a slave: suppose his father, full of compassion, had gone, at the risk of his own life, and given all that he possessed as the price of his son's redemption: suppose the son returning to his evils ways, and actually going to sell himself again to his former master: if his father should follow him, with the invitation in the text, could he fail of success? Must not his son have an heart of adamant, if he could withstand such a solicitation?—The application of this to our own case is easy: O that we may realize the idea for our good!—]

2. As an encouragement under our fears

[Notwithstanding the numberless proofs which God has given us of his readiness to forgive sin, we are apt to think him hard and inexorable—But the argument here used may well dissipate our unbelieving fears—Let us conceive the Saviour, at the very instant of his resurrection, meeting one of his murderers, and importuning him, by the very wounds which he had made, to accept of mercy, and assuring him that, if he would believe, the blood that he had shed, should cleanse him from the guilt of shedding it: could that man entertain a doubt of the Saviour's willingness to shew mercy?—This very thing is done to us, whose sins were the real occasion of Jesus' death: he meets us in the word, and, with his wounds yet exhibited before our eyes, addresses us in the words of the text—Let all unworthy conceptions of him then be put away, and every soul return to him as able and willing to save us to the uttermost—]

APPLICATION

[Careless sinners overlook, alas! all these considerations—but if they would consider the Saviour as addressing *them*, and as following them with these words into all their retirements, yea, into all their resorts of gaiety and dissipation, what a damp would such a reflection cast on all their vicious appetites and unshallowed enjoyments!—Methinks it would not be possible for them long to withstand the influence of such a thought———To backsliding professors these words must be applied with tenfold emphasis—How pungent must such an invitation be to those, who, having once experienced

the efficacy of the blood of Christ, have relapsed into a luke-warm Laodicean state!—How shocking must their ingratitude appear, and how great their folly!—Let all such, if such there be amongst us, attend to this gracious call, and return, without delay, to their duties, their privileges, their enjoyments———]

CCCCXXVII. EXHORTATION TO RECEIVE THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL.

Isaiah iv. 1—3. Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

WE can never sufficiently admire the condescension and grace of God in noticing such insignificant and worthless creatures as we are. That he should provide for our returning wants, and permit us to ask of him the things we stand in need of, may well excite our deepest astonishment. But that he should be as much interested in our welfare, as if his own happiness and glory depended on it, seems utterly incredible; yet, that this is really the case, is manifest from the earnest invitations and entreaties, which he uses to prevail upon us to accept of mercy. In confirmation of this, we need only notice the passage before us, in which God, with inexpressible affection, labours to awaken the attention of sinners to their own truest happiness, and to bring them to the enjoyment of everlasting salvation.

In his words we may observe

I. An invitation

No words could be devised that should more forcibly declare God's desire for our welfare

[The blessings of the gospel are here set forth under the most natural and expressive image. What can be more re-

freshing than water? more reviving than wine? more nutritious than milk? yet do these but faintly represent the operations of the gospel on the soul of man. Nor can water or milk be by any means dispensed with; they are altogether necessary for human subsistence: so that on this account also are they fit emblems of spiritual blessings. What would be the state of man if there were no Saviour to atone for him, no Spirit to renew him, no God and Father to preserve and bless him? On the contrary, how revived and animated is he by the promises of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory! Such then are the blessings which God offers to mankind. He invites every one that thirsteth: every person, whatever have been his character or conduct, is called: if only he thirst, nothing shall be a bar to his acceptance. Yet no man need to decline the invitation, under the idea that he is not welcome, because he does not thirst enough: if he be willing, that is sufficient.^a Nor need any one be discouraged at the thought that he has nothing wherewith to purchase these benefits: for though they are to be bought, it is "without money and without price;" and therefore they, "who have no money," are particularly specified in the invitation. Indeed, if any man bring a price in his hand, he shall surely go empty away: Christ has paid the price; nor can we obtain any thing, unless we be willing to receive it as the free gift of God through Christ.

The earnestness, with which God intreats us to accept these blessings, is well worthy of our notice. He personates an herald standing in the place of public concourse, and, in the accustomed manner, calling the attention of all around him. He then expatiates on the blessings which he is ready to communicate, and the terms on which he will bestow them: he describes the persons to whose necessities the blessings are suited, and to whose indigence the terms are more especially adapted: and then, as though he were determined to take no refusal, he cries, "Come," "come," "come."]

And shall we despise such a gracious invitation?

[Let us but contemplate the blessings we are invited to partake of: how rich, how suitable, how necessary! — — — Let us reflect on the terms on which they are offered: can any thing be more encouraging? — — — Let us recollect who it is that calls us: Is he used to mock his people? or is he incapable of supplying all their wants? — — — Let us consider his descriptions of the persons invited: can any thing be more encouraging? and shall we not be inexcusable if we turn a deaf ear to such intreaties? — —]

^a So St. John expounds the passage Rev. xxii. 17.

But God, knowing our extreme backwardness to go to him, urges us yet further by

II. An expostulation

Our infatuation justly calls for a severe reproof

[The contemners of God's invitations may be comprised under two classes, the worldly-minded, and the self-righteous. Both of these despise the offers of the gospel; the one, because they have no relish for spiritual things; the other, because they think they already possess them: the one find their happiness in the pursuit or enjoyment of earthly things; the other in self-applauding reflections on their own goodness. But we may appeal to both, whether they have ever attained any abiding satisfaction in their respective courses? Have pleasures, riches, or honours ever proved a source of solid peace? Are they "bread" proper for the *soul*? Does not the comfort, derived from such things, fail us in the hour that we most need it? And will any satisfaction arise from the remembrance of them, when we stand at the bar of judgment? Nor however laudable the conduct of the self-righteous may be in the sight of men, can it yield them the comfort they aspire after: it cannot satisfy either God or their own consciences; not God, because it does not fulfil the demands of his law; not themselves, because they never can know that they have done enough to procure them acceptance with God: in the midst of all their boasted confidence, they have many misgiving fears lest they should have laboured for nought, and "spent their money for that which is not bread."

To impress this thought on our minds, God contrasts the blessings he offers, with those which we foolishly prefer. He calls them "good," and declares that they will "delight the soul with fatness." And they are not good? What so worthy of this character, as a free and full pardon, to the guilty; a peace that passeth all understanding, to the troubled; renewed strength, to the weak; and everlasting glory, to the lost? Can these be received into the soul, and not comfort it? or can they be promised to us by a faithful God, and not satisfy the mind? Surely they are "meat indeed, and drink indeed;" nor can they fail of filling us with "joy unspeakable and glorified."]

Let us then call ourselves to an account for our conduct

[Who amongst us has not had abundant experience of the insufficiency of every thing, except the gospel, to make us happy? And shall we yet persist in our error? shall we never cease to "hew out to ourselves broken cisterns," when we might have access to "the fountain of living waters?" shall we still grasp at a shadow, while we lose the substance?— — —

What reason can we assign to ourselves for such obstinacy? and what shall we assign to God, when he shall interrogate us respecting it in the day of judgment? shall we plead a want of information? God has informed us. Shall we say that the blessings of salvation were out of our reach? God has freely offered them to us: nor is it any thing but a deliberate rejection of his mercy, that can finally destroy us———]

Lest any thing should be wanting to affect our hearts, God confirms his invitation with

III. A promise

There is not any thing which God will not do for those who obey his call

[Whatever a carnal man may enjoy, he has no right or title to eternal life. On the contrary, whatever a spiritual man may want, this privilege he shall assuredly possess, “his soul shall live.” Nor shall this life be terminated like the life of the body; for God will make a covenant with him, “an everlasting covenant,” a “covenant ordered in all things and sure;” so that every thing necessary for the maintaining and perfecting of this life shall be secured to him. And as the Father gave unto his Son “the sure mercies of David” by raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand in heaven,^b so will he bestow on his believing people every thing that he ever promised unto his church. Notwithstanding he may suffer for a time their state to appear forlorn and desperate, his mercies shall be “sure” to all his seed.

Lest we should still remain unmoved, God calls our attention to this promise, repeating his intreaties with all the energy and affection that words can express. “Hearken,” says he, as to a distant sound which you are solicitous to hear: hearken “diligently,” not suffering any thing to divert your attention for one moment: “incline your ear” as one that is afraid of losing one word that is spoken to him: “hear,” determining to judge with candour, and to follow the dictates of sound wisdom. Do this, says God, and the promise shall be yours: I pledge myself by covenant and by oath that your soul shall live, and that nothing that is good shall be wanting to you either in time or in eternity.]

How incurably obstinate then must we be, if such accumulated means be used in vain!

[Is the life of the soul a matter of such indifference, that a promise of it shall have no effect on our minds? Shall God engage himself to us by covenant and by oath to supply all our need both of body and soul, and shall we account his word

unworthy of our attention? — — — Who ever experienced his blessings, and found them of no value? or whom has he ever deceived, that we dare not trust him? — — — Let us at least remember what an alternative we prefer; we reject life, and happiness, and glory, and embrace death and misery as our eternal portion — — — O that God might prevail at last! that we might now accept his gracious offers; and be made partakers of present and everlasting felicity!]

CCCCXXVIII. CHRIST A STRONG HOLD.

Zech. ix. 12. *Turn ye to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare, that I will render double unto thee.*

IF the declarations of God be humiliating, and the denunciations of his vengeance awful, we must acknowledge that his invitations and promises afford us all the encouragement we can desire; inasmuch as they are addressed to persons in those very circumstances wherein we are—Nor should we be averse to confess the truth of our state, when we see what provision God has made for our happiness and salvation—The words before us lead us to consider

I: The persons addressed

All men, as sinners, are condemned by the law of God, and may therefore be considered as prisoners arrested by divine Justice, and sentenced to eternal death—But they who hear the gospel are “prisoners of hope”

1. Though they be prisoners, yet they have an hope

[Those, who have died in their sins, are utterly without hope, being reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day—But as long as we continue in the world, we need not to despair—The invitations of the gospel are sent to us; nor can any thing but an obstinate rejection of divine mercy cut us off from the blessings of salvation—Though we are condemned, and are every hour in danger of having the sentence executed upon us, yet there is a way opened for us to escape, and we may obtain mercy even at the eleventh hour—]

2. There is however but *one* hope, unto which all are shut up^a

^a Gal. iii. 23.

[Christ is set before us as the way, the truth, and the life; nor is there any other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved—We are all inclosed as the prophets of Baal, and the order is given, Go in and slay:^b but Christ says, “I am the door;”^c and if we will flee out at that door, we shall live; if not, we shall perish in our sins—Christ came on purpose to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to them that are sitting in the prison-house he says, Go forth, and shew yourselves^d—But if we spend our time in devising other methods of escape besides that which he has provided, the hour appointed for execution will come, and we shall suffer the punishment which our sins have merited—]

Thus while we see that all, who need the provisions of the gospel, are addressed by it, let us consider

II. The invitation given them

Christ is here represented as a strong hold

[Christ is evidently the person referred to in the whole preceding context—He is that meek but powerful king, who comes to subdue all nations to himself, not by carnal weapons, but by speaking peace to them; and who confirms his kindness towards them by a covenant sealed with his own blood^e—He is represented as a strong hold to which, not the righteous only, but the most ungodly, may run for safety—Here may be some allusion to the cities of refuge to which the manslayer was appointed to flee, and in which he found protection from his blood-thirsty pursuer^f—Such a refuge is Christ, an impregnable fortress, which defies the assaults of earth and hell—]

To this we are all invited to turn

[The gospel thus exhibits Christ, not as an abstract speculation, but as a remedy which we greatly need: and, in exhorting us to “turn to this strong hold,” it recommends us to renounce all false refuges, to regard Christ as our only Saviour, and to seek in him that protection which he alone can afford us—It stretches out the hand to us, as Christ did to Peter, when he was sinking in the waves—It urges us to go without hesitation, and without delay, to him, who alone can deliver us from the wrath to come, and bring us into the liberty of God’s children—To the same effect it speaks in numberless other passages: it calls the thirsty to come for refreshment, the weary to come for rest, and to the dying says, “Look unto Christ and be ye saved”—]

^b 2 Kin. x. 18—25.

^c John x. 9.

^d Isaiah xiii. 7. xix. 9. Ixi. 1.

^e Zech. ix. 9—11.

^f Numb. xxxv. 11, 12.

But because even the most needy are apt to turn a deaf ear to the calls of the gospel, we would direct your attention to

III. The promise with which the invitation is enforced

The terms in which the promise is conveyed, are somewhat obscure

[The expression of “rendering double” will be best understood by comparing it with other passages of the same kind—From them its import appears to be, that God will give us blessings in rich abundance; not *according to* the sufferings we have endured,^h but *double*; not *corresponding to* the punishment we have deserved, but *double*: not *equal to* the blessings enjoyed by our fathers, but *double*—Or perhaps it may be best explained by the apostle’s declaration, that God will give us “abundantly, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think”—Certainly the promise implies, that we shall not only be delivered from prison, but be restored to the favour of our God; not only have our debt discharged, but be enriched with a glorious inheritance—]

The manner in which it is given is peculiarly solemn and energetic

[God is desirous that we should give implicit credit to his word: hence he speaks as one who would on no account recede from it: he speaks as in the presence of ten thousand witnesses; and pledges all his perfections for the performance of his promise—And as the day of our desponding fears is long remembered by us, and as we, in that day, find a want of all the support which God himself can administer, he dates his promise as made to us in that very day; not at a time when our difficulties were not foreseen, but when they were at the height, and when nothing but the immediate hand of God could deliver us—Yea, God would have us consider the promise as made to us *this* day, this very day, this very hour, when we most need the application of it to our souls; and, that every individual may take it to himself and rely on it as intended for himself alone, the promise is made *particular*, while the invitation is *general*]—

OBSERVE

1. How astonishing are the condescension and compassion of God!

[Behold the Judge offers mercy to the prisoners, and urges them in the most affectionate manner to accept it!—Me-

^g Isaiah xl. ii. and Ixi. 7.

^h Ps. cx. 15.

thinks prisoners in general would need no intreaty to leave their dungeons; if their prison doors were open, and their chains were beaten off, they would be glad enough to effect their escape, though at the risk of a severer punishment—Nor would a manslayer need much importunity to enter into the city of refuge, if an armed avenger were closely pursuing him—Yet we slight the invitations of our God, and the security he has provided for us—Well then might he leave us to perish!—But behold, he enforces his invitations with the most gracious promises: he engages to exceed our utmost wishes or conceptions—And shall we not admire such transcendent grace? Shall we not adore him for such marvellous loving-kindness?—O let every heart glow with love to him, and every tongue declare his praise!—]

2. How reasonable is zeal in the concerns of religion!

[Zeal is approved in every thing, but in that, which most of all deserves it—But would any one ask a defeated army, why they fled with haste to an impregnable fortress? Surely, it is no less absurd to condemn the prisoners of hope for any earnestness they may manifest in turning to their strong hold—Coldness in such circumstances is the most deplorable infatuation—Let all then exert themselves to the utmost of their power—Let them never regard the scoffs of those who are in love with their chains, and regardless of the salvation offered them—But let them strive, as men wrestling for the mastery, and run as those that are determined to win the prize—]

3. How great is the danger of delay!

[Now we are prisoners of hope! but soon we may be in that prison from whence there is no escape, and into which not one ray of hope can ever enter—Shall we not then turn, while the strong hold is open to us? Shall we stay till the gate is shut; and thus, instead of obtaining double mercies, procure to ourselves an aggravated condemnation?—To-day God invites and promises; to-morrow may terminate our day of grace—Let us then no longer delay; but “to-day, while it is called to-day, let us hear his voice,” and “flee for refuge to the hope set before us”—]

CCCCXXIX. CHRIST'S OFFER OF THE SPIRIT.

John vii. 37, 38. In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

OUR blessed Lord incessantly laboured for the salvation of men—

Nor could their ungrateful returns at all divert him from his purpose—

His life was sought, and he knew that persons were sent to apprehend him—

Yet, instead of rejecting them with abhorrence, he sought to win them by love—

And importuned them to accept his richest blessings—

His address to them on this occasion contained

I. An invitation

The time and manner of the invitation are worthy of notice

[This was a day of peculiar sanctity, and of uncommon festivity^a—

And it seems that some customs, not required in the original institutions of the law, obtained among the Jews at that time^b—

Happy to improve the opportunity, Jesus stood in the most conspicuous place, and, with an exalted voice, claimed their attention—

And, despising equally the censures of the uncharitable, and the persecutions of the proud, he made them fresh overtures of mercy—]

The invitation itself was beyond measure gracious and kind

[While they only panted for his blood, he longed for their salvation—

He pointed himself out to them as the only fountain of living waters—

^a It was the eighth and last day of the feast of tabernacles, Lev. xxiii. 34, 36.

^b It is said that on this day they went annually to the pool of Siloam, and drawing water from thence returned with it in procession to the temple, where they poured it out with all possible demonstrations of joy. At what time this custom arose, it is not easy to determine; but probably it commenced after the Babylonish captivity; and was adopted in reference to that prediction, Isaiah xii. 3. Nor is the design of it precisely known: but it seems most likely that they then commemorated the giving of water out of the rock in the wilderness; and called upon God for rain, which was so necessary to them at that season. Perhaps the more spiritual among them, might pray also for those spiritual blessings, which their promised Messiah was appointed to bestow. These circumstances served as the foundation of our Lord's address, and reflect much light upon it.

And assured them of his readiness to impart whatsoever they stood in need of—

He excepted none from his offers, provided they did but “thirst” for his blessings—

What could have a more conciliatory effect on his blood-thirsty murderers?—]

Lest, however, his invitations should be slighted, he enforced it with

II. A promise

He first explained what he meant by “coming to him”

[It was not a mere outward, but an inward and spiritual application, that he wished them to make to him—

They were to “believe in him,” as possessing all fulness in himself—

And as the person appointed of the Father to convey blessings to them^d—

In a full persuasion of this truth they were to come to him by faith—

And to “draw water with joy from this well of salvation”—]

For their encouragement he promised them a rich effusion of his Spirit

[By “living water” our Lord meant the gift of his Spirit^e—

That “rivers of this living water should flow out of his belly,” importeth, that the believer should have a constant spring of consolation within him, which should refresh all who came within the sphere of his influence—

Of this blessed truth the scriptures had abundantly testified—

And our Lord now confirmed it to them by a most solemn promise—

He assured them, as he had before done the Samaritan woman, that his communications to them should prove a source of unutterable and endless joy^f—]

We shall further IMPROVE this subject by addressing

1. Those who have no desire after spiritual blessings

^e Col. i. 19.

^d Ps. lxxii. 17.

^e Ver. 39.

^f Some, because our Lord's words are not found in scripture, καθὼς εἶπεν η γέραφη with ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ; (translating εἴπειν, hath required) but there are many passages that speak to the same effect, though not in his express terms. See Isaiah xliv. 3.

^g John iv. 10, 13, 14.

[Alas! how many are there who are insatiable in their thirst after earthly things; but never once desire the blessings which Christ is exalted to bestow!]

Perhaps too they think that they contract no guilt by their neglect of him—

But it is with no small indignation that God speaks of their conduct^b—

Nor would their folly be hidden from themselves, if they only considered what “broken cisterns” the sources of their comfort have invariably proved—

O that they would drink of the living fountain before they experience the want of one “drop of water to cool their tongues!”—]

2. Those who desire spiritual blessings, but know not where to go for them

[Many, like those whom our Lord addressed, look no further than to the outward duty—

But he directed their eyes to himself as the true Siloam,ⁱ the only fountain of good—

Thus must we also direct you to faith in Christ, as the one means of obtaining blessings from him—

Whatever delight you may take in duties, you must remember that ordinances are but the medium of communication between Christ and you—

And that the benefits you receive will be proportioned to the faith you exercise on him—]

3. Those who desire spiritual blessings, but fear that Christ is unwilling to impart them

[Too many are discouraged because their prayers are not answered instantly—

They conclude themselves so unworthy as to have excited nothing but aversion in the heart of Christ towards them—

But are you unworthy? and were not they also to whom the text was addressed—

Have you waited long in vain? and is [there not a special promise given for your encouragement?^k—

Have you nothing to present to Christ in return? Then he bids you come without money and without price!^l—

Will it be an unparalleled act of mercy? Then is it that new thing which he has undertaken to perform^m—

Fear not then, but renew your application to him with increased fervour—

And your soul shall ere long “be as a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not”ⁿ—]

^b Jer ii. 13.

ⁱ John ix. 7.

^k Isaiah xli. 17, 18.

^l Isaiah iv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17.

^m Isaiah xlivi. 19, 20.

ⁿ Isaiah lviii. 11.

CCCCXXX. THE HEAVY-LADEN INVITED TO CHRIST.

Matt. xi. 28: *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.*

IT is thought by many, that the gospel is a mere system of notions, which may be received without benefit, or rejected without loss. But it is rather proposed to us as a remedy for all the miseries, which sin has brought into the world. In it we are represented as guilty and undone: but Christ is set before us as a Saviour, and is exhibited under every figure that can unfold his excellency, or endear him to our souls. Under the Old Testament, he is shadowed forth as a brazen serpent to heal the wounded, as a city of refuge to protect the manslayer, and as a sacrifice to remove the sinner's guilt.. In the New Testament, he speaks of himself as bread for the hungry, as living water for the thirsty, as a physician for the sick, and, to mention no more, as a kind and hospitable friend, who invites to him the weary and heavy-laden.

In the words here addressed to us, we may notice
I. The characters invited

Under the description of the weary and heavy-laden we must certainly include those, who groaned under the burthen of *the Mosaic law*

[The ceremonial law required a great multitude of ritual observances, which, to those who saw not their typical use and tendency, must have appeared frivolous and arbitrary; and, even to those who had some insight into their meaning, they were an irksome task, and an intolerable burthen. From this yoke however the Messiah was to deliver them; he was to annul the old covenant with all its ceremonies, and to establish a better covenant in its stead.^a When therefore our Lord proclaimed himself to be the Messiah, he invited to him all that were weary and heavy-laden with the Mosaic law, and assured them, that the yoke which he would impose upon them was light and easy—]

There is however a further reference to those who laboured under *temporal afflictions*

^a Heb. viii. 8, 13.

[None are such strangers to the common lot of mortality, as not to know that mankind are subject to many grievous troubles. Indeed, such are the calamities incident to life, that few, who have been long in the world, can cordially "thank God for their creation." But more especially when the hand of God is heavy upon us, and we feel the weight of great and multiplied afflictions, we are ready to hate our very existence, and to "choose strangling rather than life." Many probably of those, to whom Jesus addressed himself, had drunk deep of the cup of sorrow: for their encouragement therefore he promised, that, whatever their trials were, whether in mind, or body, or estate, if only they would come to him, they should find a relief from all; or (what would be of equal value) support and comfort under their pressure—]

But doubtless we must principally understand by these terms those who are oppressed with *a sense of sin*

[Though all are sinners, all do not feel the weight of sin, because they know not what tremendous evils it has brought upon them. But *when any are awakened* from their lethargic state, and see what a good and holy God they have offended, they begin to tremble, lest the wrath of God should break forth upon them to consume them utterly. Perhaps they obtain a transient peace *by means of* their repentance and reformation; but their *subsequent falls* and backslidings rend open the wounds afresh, and make them feel how hopeless their condition must be, if they be left to themselves. Even after they have attained peace through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, so that they no longer tremble for fear of condemnation, they groan more than ever *under the burthen of their indwelling corruptions*, saying, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"^b These are the persons for whose relief our Lord came into the world, and whom, above all, he invited to him in the words before us—]

To ascertain more fully the import of his address, we proceed to consider

H. The invitation itself

By the expression, "Come unto me," our Lord could not mean to call them nearer to him, because they were already round about him: but, as he himself explains the words, he called them to believe on him;^c or, in other words, to come to him in the exercise of *faith*, of *hope*, and of *love*.

Its import will best appear in a short paraphrase

^b Rom. vii. 24.

^c John vi. 35, 37, 44, 45, 65.

[“To impart rest unto you all is the great end of my appearance in the world. Seek it therefore in me, and come to me, that ye may receive it at my hands. Turn not away from me as an impostor; for I am the very person referred to in your prophecies, and sent unto you by the Father. Go not any longer to the vanities of this world in search of rest; for it is not in them; it is a gift which none but myself can impart unto you. Keep not back, from an apprehension that you can make satisfaction for your own sins, or cleanse yourselves from your iniquities: for you can never have redemption, but through my blood; nor can you ever subdue your lusts, but by my all-sufficient grace. Neither delay your coming on account of your own unworthiness, as if it were necessary for you to bring some meritorious services as the price of my favour: come, just as you are, with all your sins upon you; stop not to heal yourselves in part; but come instantly to your Physician: come and receive all my blessings freely, “without money, and without price.” Come *in faith*, believing me able to save you to the uttermost, and as willing as I am able. Come also *in hope*: let your expectations be enlarged: “ye are not straitened in me; be not straitened in your own bowels.” Count up all the blessings of time; survey all the glories of eternity: stretch your imagination to the uttermost; ask all that eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived; and I will not only grant your requests, but give “exceeding abundantly above all that ye can ask or think:” “open your mouths wide, and I will fill them.” Come moreover *in love*. Be not like persons driven to me through mere necessity, and influenced by nothing but a dread of condemnation; but contemplate my character, meditate on my kindness, strive to comprehend the heights and depths of my love; and let a sense of my love constrain you to walk with me, to depend upon me, to delight yourselves in me.

Such may be supposed the import of the invitation. And every one who is weary and heavy-laden, whatever his burthen be, may consider it as addressed to himself in particular, as much as ever it was to those, who waited on the personal ministry of our Lord. Let us then hear him thus inviting us, as it were, with his dying breath, and from his throne of glory: and let us go to him with one accord; yea, let us fly to him on the wings of love, even “as the doves to their windows”—]

That nothing might be wanting to give efficacy to his invitation, our Lord added

III. The promise with which it is enforced

The world are glad to see us in our prosperity, and

when we can participate in their pleasures : but in a day of adversity, when want and trouble come upon us, they are but too apt to lessen their regards, and to grow weary of our complaints. How different is the conduct of Jesus ! He bids us "call upon him in the time of trouble," and, instead of turning a deaf ear to our complaints, promises to "give us rest."

How *suitable* is this promise to those to whom it is made !

[What do the weary and heavy-laden desire? If their troubles be of a temporal nature, they wish for something that shall soothe the anguish of their minds, and be a support unto their souls: and *this* Jesus administers by the aids of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit. Are their sorrows altogether spiritual? He speaks peace unto their conscience, saying unto them, "Be of good cheer, I am thy salvation :" he discovers to them the sufficiency of his blood to cleanse them from sin, and the efficacy of his grace to subdue and mortify their lusts. He gives them that, which nothing else in the universe can supply, a firm and stable hope of pardon and peace, of holiness and glory. Whatever other blessings he should offer to the soul, they would be all despised in comparison of this: it is bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, healing to the sick, and life to the dead.]

And can any thing be more *precious* to a heavy-laden soul?

[The term used in the text imports far more than an exemption from labour and trouble: it implies also that refreshment which a great and seasonable relief administers. And how sweet is that peace which he imparts to a believing penitent! it is a "peace that passeth understanding," a "joy unspeakable and glorified." Surely the consolations of his Spirit are not unfitly called "an *earnest* of our inheritance," since they are indeed a beginning and foretaste of heaven in the soul. But we must extend our thoughts yet further, even to "the rest that remaineth for the people of God." Doubtless that was most eminently in the view of our blessed Lord; nor shall any thing short of all the glory and felicity of heaven be the portion of those who come to him aright.]

That it is a *true and faithful* saying there can be no doubt

[Never did any come to our Lord without experiencing his truth and faithfulness. Many indeed there are who profess to follow him, while yet they are far from enjoying this promised blessing: but, instead of coming to him in faith and hope, and love, they are impelled only by terror; they listen

to the suggestions of despondency; and they live under the reigning power of unbelief. No wonder then that they find not the rest which they desire. But if any go to him aright, there is no guilt, however great, which is not removed from their conscience, no tumult of contending passions that is not moderated and restrained, nor any earthly trouble in which they are not enabled to rejoice and glory. If under any calamity whatever we go to him like the apostle, like him shall we receive such an answer as will turn our sorrow into joy, and make the very occasions of grief to be the sources of exultation and triumph.^{b]}

APPLICATION

1. To those who feel not the burthen of sin

[If we be exempt in a measure from earthly calamities, we have reason to rejoice. But to be unacquainted with spiritual troubles is no proper subject for self-congratulation. It is "the broken and contrite heart only, which God will not despise." We may boast of our goodness, like the Pharisee, or the elder brother in the parable:^c but, like them, we shall have no forgiveness with God, nor any part in that joy, which returning prodigals shall experience in their Father's house. We must "sow in tears, if ever we would reap in joy:" we must be heavy-laden with a sense of sin, if ever we would experience the rest which Christ will give.^f]

2. To those who are seeking rest

[It is indeed a mercy to have an awakened conscience: but you must now guard with earnest and equal care against self-righteous hopes and desponding fears. You may be ready to fear that your burthens are too heavy to be removed, and your sins too great to be forgiven: but the persons, whom Christ invites, are the heavy-laden, yea, *all* of them without exception, whatever be their burthens, and whatever be their sins. On the other hand, you may be tempted to seek rest in your duties or your frames: but it is Christ alone that ever can bestow it, and from him you must receive it as a free unmerited gift. Endeavour therefore to draw nigh to him in his appointed way; and be assured that he will draw nigh to you with his promised blessings.]

3. To those who have attained rest and peace

[A deliverance from fear and trouble, instead of relaxing our obligation to watchfulness, binds us to tenfold diligence in the ways of God. When therefore our Lord invites us to come to him for rest, he adds, "Take my yoke upon you;"

^d 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.

^e Luke xv. 28, 29. and xviii. 11, 14.

^f Jer. ii. 35.

and then repeats the promise, in order to intimate, that a submission to his will is as necessary to our happiness, as an affiance in his name.^g Let this then be your daily care. If his yoke were ever so grievous, you could not reasonably hesitate to bear it, since the burthen of sin and misery, that he has removed from you, is infinitely heavier than any other can be. But “his yoke is easy and his burthen is light;” and the bearing of it will conduce, no less to your present, than to your everlasting felicity.]

^g Ver. 29.

CCCCXXXI. LOOKING TO CHRIST.

Isaiah xlvi. 22. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

MANY consider the scriptures merely as a history of past events, and imagine that the declarations contained in it are to be confined to those persons, for whose immediate use they were written—But such an idea reduces the sacred volume to a dead letter, calculated indeed to amuse the curious, but not to awaken the secure, or comfort the feeble-minded—But there are numberless passages which, though originally applied to individual persons, are quoted by the apostles as applicable to mankind in every age—Doubtless then, the invitation before us, though primarily addressed to idolaters, is intended to be sounded forth throughout all the world—Let us then consider

I. The invitation

The person, who is here speaking, is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ; since the very words following the text are quoted by an inspired apostle as issuing from his mouth^a—Here

1. He directs us what means to use in order to salvation

[“Looking to” Jesus is a figurative expression of the same

^a Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

import with many others used in scripture, such as coming to him, fleeing to him, &c.—Its meaning is obvious, especially when connected with salvation as the end to be attained by it—One immediately perceives the state of the cripple's mind, of whom it is said, that he gave heed to Peter and John expecting to receive something of them;^b nor can we be at any loss to ascertain the meaning of looking to Christ for salvation: it must import an humble sense of our lost estate, an ardent desire after his preferred mercy, and a persuasion that he is able to impart the blessings we stand in need of—Without such views, such desires, and such a faith, we should no more look to him for salvation than a person in health would go to a physician, or make use of his prescriptions^c— — —If any thing can clearly exemplify the nature of this duty, it is the state of the wounded Israelites when they looked to the brazen serpent:^d they felt their wounds, they knew them to be incurable by human art, they were convinced that they must quickly perish if they did not use the appointed means, and they turned their eyes towards it in hope of experiencing the promised recovery—And exactly thus must we look to Christ, if we would be made partakers of his salvation^e]—

2. He promises that we shall not use those means in vain

[His words undoubtedly imply a promise, though they are not delivered in the form of one—They consider all as obnoxious to the wrath of God—They are not addressed to sinners of a peculiarly atrocious character, but to “all the ends of the earth”—But while they thus insinuate that none can save themselves, they offer salvation to all without any distinction of character, provided they follow the direction given them—Such shall surely be saved from wrath: their sins, however great and manifold, shall be forgiven them—The infection that pervades their souls shall be healed—Yea, more, the favour of God, the beauty of holiness, and all the glory of heaven shall be imparted to them—The salvation here spoken of is justly called, “The salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory:” and in the name of Christ we can promise it to all who comply with the terms on which it is offered to them—]

Alluring as this invitation is, it derives additional importance from

II. The arguments with which it is enforced

^b Acts iii. 4, 5.

^d Numb. xxi. 7—9.

^c Mark ii. 17.

^e John iii. 14, 15.

That he may prevail on an ignorant and careless world, our blessed Lord reminds them of

1. His all-sufficiency to save them

[That Christ is God, is a truth on which our present and eternal happiness depend—Nor is there wanting all that evidence for it which the most scrupulous or doubtful mind can require—Indeed, if he were a mere creature, however exalted, we might well question his authority to issue such a command, or his ability to impart the promised blessing—But his Godhead at once enforces both his direction and his promise—“Look unto me; for I am GOD,” and enjoin you to do so at the peril of your souls. “You shall be saved; for I am GOD,” and am therefore able to save you to the very uttermost—Were I a creature, you might be afraid to trust in me; but is not the blood of an incarnate GOD sufficient to make atonement for your sin? Is not the arm of GOD able to subdue your enemies before you? Or is there any variableness or shadow of turning in me,” that you should question my fidelity? Am I not “the GOD that changeth not?”—Know then that while my Godhead is your warrant for looking to me, it is my pledge to you for the performance of my promise—My brethren, can you resist the force of such an argument?—]

2. The insufficiency of every other hope

[We are prone to look to every other being for help rather than to Christ—But he plainly warns us that “there is none else”—Could we obtain salvation by any other means, the force of his invitation would be enervated: however the way prescribed by him might deserve a preference, we should feel ourselves, as it were, at liberty to disregard it—But in vain will be our utmost exertions, if we endeavour to save ourselves by any methods of man’s device—We are “shut up unto the faith that is revealed”—We may as well attempt to create an universe as to atone for sin, or to fulfil the strict commands of God’s law—There is no remedy but that proposed, of looking unto Jesus: “there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ”—Observe then the weight of this argument also: it is as though Jesus had said, “to whom will ye go? I, and I alone, have the words of eternal life:^f if you follow after righteousness in any other way, you will never attain unto it:^g you have but one option to look unto me, or to perish for ever”—The Lord grant that, if we be not drawn by love, we may at least be impelled by necessity to accept his invitation!—]

^f John i. 1. Rom. ix. 5.

^g John. vi. 68.

^b Rom. ix. 31, 32.

We would yet further ADDRESS this invitation to

1. Those who are careless and indifferent about salvation

[How lamentable is it, that Jesus should thus invite sinners, and they be altogether inattentive to his voice!—Ye careless and supine, consider Jesus as addressing you upon his first entrance into the world: “Look unto me, and see how I have humbled myself for you: though I am God, yet have I taken upon myself your nature, that I might save your souls: I am come from heaven to seek and save you; O let not such condescension and love be lost upon you”—Think again that ye hear him speaking to you from the garden of Gethsemane: “Look unto me, and behold how I am overcome with agony, and bathed from head to foot in a bloody sweat: this, sinners, is for you; it is your guilt that weighs me down, and your curse that I am now enduring: reflect a moment on the evil and danger of your state; for “if these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”—If sin has so overwhelmed your incarnate God, how will ye endure the punishment of it to all eternity!—Suppose him yet again calling to you from the cross; “Look unto me, ye perishing world: see what a multitude of sorrows encompass me; and how my heart in the midst of me is even like melting wax, so utterly is it consumed by the fire of divine wrath: see, how I am forsaken by my own Father, and am shortly to expire in the midst of all this shame and torment: but it is for you; to save you from everlasting death: and I shall be satisfied with all the travail of my soul, if only you will look to me for salvation: let me but have the joy of saving you, and I am content: but oh, let me not pay the price of your souls for nought”—Once more; view him seated on his throne of glory, and consider him as addressing you from thence; “Look unto me; it is for your sakes that I am exalted to his throne; it is that I may impart that salvation to you, which once I purchased for you: as once I governed every thing in my divine nature, so now in my mediatorial capacity is all power committed to me, that I may raise you also to a participation of my own glory: and all that I require of you is, to look unto me: O sinners, turn not a deaf ear to my intreaties; but let me save you with an everlasting salvation”]

Are there now any so obdurate as to disregard his voice? Say, beloved, is salvation so slight a matter that ye are indifferent whether ye ever obtain it or not? Or are the terms, on which it is offered, so grievous, that ye cannot bring your minds to submit to them?—What easier terms can God himself propose than those, “Look and be saved!—O delay no longer, but say with the Prophet, “I will look unto the Lord;

I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me”¹]—

2. Those who, through a sense of their unworthiness, dare not accept the salvation offered them

[Persons, who are deeply convinced of their guilt and misery, are apt to think themselves too unworthy to be the objects of divine mercy; and to exclude themselves from the number of those who are invited: “Can it be true, say they, that Jesus speaks to me; and that I have only to look unto him in order to insure my everlasting salvation? Surely this invitation cannot be for such a wretch as I am: gladly would I accept it, if I dared; but I shall be only as a dog snatching at “the children’s bread”—But, beloved, why should any of you exclude yourselves? Does not Jesus address himself to sinners of every description, even to “all the ends of the earth?” And did you ever hear of one whom he rejected? If none ever applied to him in vain for the healing of their bodies, shall any look to him in vain for the saving of their souls?—When he gave this invitation, was he not aware how unworthy you were? Did he not know the extent and efficacy of his own atonement? Did he not consider whether there was any thing in your case that was too hard for him to surmount? Or did he issue this invitation only to mock and disappoint you?—Let it be granted, you have some reason to doubt his power or his willingness to save you: yet, at least, put him to the trial, and see whether he will fulfil his word or not—Of this you are sure, that if he cannot save, no one else can; and that, if he will not, you will, at least lose nothing by accepting his invitation—But you need not fear; he is God; and “his mercy as far exceeds your sins, as the heavens are higher than the earth;”—Put away then your desponding thoughts, and “encourage yourselves in the Lord your God”—Thus shall you be numbered with his redeemed; and spend eternity in singing, “Salvation to God and to the Lamb”]
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¹ Mic. vii. 7.

CCCCXXXII. THE DUTY OF HOPING IN GOD.

Psalm cxxx. 7, 8. *Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

THAT advice which flows from experience is at all times most worthy of our attention. In this view the

words of our text claim peculiar regard. David, in the Psalm before us, records a very signal deliverance which he had recently experienced, probably from an overwhelming sense of his own guilt and corruption: and, having informed us what methods he had used to obtain deliverance, and how effectual they had proved for his restoration to happiness, he recommends the adoption of them to all the people of God under all difficulties whatsoever; and assures them, that they shall not in any instance fail of success: “Let Israel,” &c,

He sets before us

I. Our duty

Hope in God, as men generally use the term, is nothing more than an unfounded expectation that God will save us, whatever be our state, and whatever be our conduct. But a scriptural hope implies a suitable regard to the things we hope for, and to him in whom our hope is placed. It implies

1. That we pray to him with fervour

[This was united with the Psalmist’s hope:^a and it must also be with ours.^b To pretend to hope in God while we neglect to spread our wants before him, is the grossest hypocrisy, and the most fatal delusion.^c]

2. That we wait for him with patience

[It was in this manner that David exercised his hope.^d Nor can we act otherwise, if we be sincere in our profession.^e To be impatient, is an unequivocal mark of unbelief, and despondency.^f But to wait patiently the Lord’s leisure is the office and evidence of faith and hope.^g]

3. That we depend on him with stedfastness

[The promises of God to those who seek him, must be the ground of our hope.^h We are not to regard difficulties of any kind, as though they could prove any obstacle to God. However circumstances, both within and without, may seem to justify despair, we must “hope beyond and against hope,”ⁱ assured that, as nothing is impossible with God, so not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail.]

^a Ver. 1, 2.

^b Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^c Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^d Ver. 5, 6.

^e Rom. viii. 25.

^g Hab. ii. 3.

^f Isaiah xxviii. 16. 1 Sam. xiii. 11, 12.

^h Job xiii. 15. Isaiah I. 10.

^b Ver. 5. ⁱ πολὺ ἀπίδε Rom. iv. 18. Job xiii. 15. Isaiah I. 10.

This duty being of infinite importance, and of universal obligation, let us consider

II. Our encouragement to perform it

If we look inward, we shall find nothing but discouragement. But if, with David, we look to God, we may find abundant encouragement

1. In his attributes

[While justice bears a frowning aspect, mercy smiles on the repenting sinner. God has opened a way for the exercise of his mercy in perfect consistency with the demands of justice; and to exercise it is his delight.^k This attribute is as essential to his nature as wisdom, or power, or any other.^l Nor needs he to have it excited by a view of our misery; (much less by any meritorious services of ours) it is ever "with him;" and is ready to manifest itself towards all those who call upon him.^m.]

2. In his works

[“Redemption” is the crown of all his works: and this also is with him, that he may impart it to those who groan under their sore bondage. Yea, with him is “plenteous” redemption: he himself as our near kinsman, (bone of our bone, and flesh of our fleshⁿ) has the right of redemption vested in him:^o and, having ability to pay the price, he will discharge our debt, and restore us, not only to liberty, but also to the inheritance which we have so basely alienated.]

3. In his word

[The declaration of his determined purpose by an inspired writer, is equivalent to an express promise. And, if the extent and certainty of this promise be considered, what an encouragement will it afford us to hope in God! There is no limitation whatever to the promise, provided, like “Israel” of old, we wrestle with God for the performance of it.^p However numerous and inveterate our iniquities may be, they shall “all” be pardoned, and “all” subdued.^q.]

APPLICATION

1. To prevent any abuse of this subject, we shall guard it

[The repetition of the name “Israel” distinctly marks the characters to whom the text is more immediately to be

^k Mic. vii. 18.

^l Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^m Rom. x. 12.

ⁿ Eph. v. 30.

^o Lev. xxv. 25, 47, 48, 49.

^p Gen. xxxii. 24—28.

^q Isaiah i. 18.

applied. It is the *praying*, *waiting*, and *depending* sinner that is exhorted to hope in God: and it is he alone who can expect redemption at the hands of God. Let such therefore see their duty and their privilege: but let those who live in the habitual neglect of God know, that their “hope is as a spider’s web, that shall soon be swept away with the besom of destruction.”^r]

2. To impress the subject more deeply on our minds, we shall enforce it

[The advice here given is the most suitable that can be given, and if followed, will be productive of the greatest happiness. Were any of us directed to indulge an hope from our own endeavours, we should soon perceive the folly of such advice. Every day and hour would bring us fresh occasion for despair. But in God there is nothing wanting: he has the *right*, the *power*, and the *will* to redeem us. Nor, if we trust in him, shall we ever be confounded.^s

Let us therefore not limit either the mercy or power of our God; but putting away all self-righteous hopes,^t or unbelieving fears,^u let us repose an unlimited confidence in our merciful and faithful Redeemer.]

^r Job viii. 13, 14.

^t Phil. iii. 3.

^s Isaiah xlvi. 17.

^u Ps. xliii. 11.

CCCCXXXIII. THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S MERCY.

Isaiah xliii. 23—26. *I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.*

THE sinfulness of man, and the goodness of God, are subjects, which mutually illustrate each other: neither can be viewed in its true colours, unless it be considered in its relation to the other: but both appear in perfection, when they are brought into immediate contrast together. This is the view, in which they are frequently presented to us in the holy scriptures; and especially in the passage now before us; in which we have

I. A contrasted view of God's conduct towards us, and of ours towards him

God has not required any oppressive services of us

[God, as the author of our being, has a right to all our time, and all our faculties: but he requires of us only one day in seven, to be spent in his more immediate service. The law, which he imposed upon the Jews, appeared indeed burthen-some, through the infirmity of their flesh; though, when considered in its true light, it ought not to have appeared so.^a As for us, we are wholly freed from that yoke, and have only two easy and significant rites to observe. Nor is the moral law burthen-some; for the whole substance of it is, Be holy, and be happy:^b and if a permission were given us to violate any one of its commands, it would be, in fact, a dispensation to make ourselves miserable.]

But we have been backward to offer him any token of respect and love

[The Jews grudged to purchase a little calamus for the holy perfume and incense.^c Nor, if they brought any sacrifices, would they present the fat and good of their flocks, but rather, such as were lean and refuse.^d Thus we have just waited upon God in his outward ordinances, but have withheld from him that which alone could render our services pleasing in his sight, the tribute of an humble, contrite, and grateful heart. To mortify our lusts, and exercise devout and heavenly affections, would have cost us more pain and labour than we have been willing to afford: we have therefore wholly declined such services, and contented ourselves with offering only the cheap sacrifices of external and occasional formalities.]

Yea, instead of serving him aright, we have even
“wearied him with our iniquities”

[How awful the charge, which God himself here brings against us! He, who might justly demand any thing of us, has not required of us any great services, or wearied us with an intolerable yoke: but we, who are bound by every tie to please and honour him to the uttermost, have quite oppressed and wearied him by our long continued iniquities, till he is even “pressed under us, as a cart is pressed, that is full of

^a It was necessary, in order to keep them separate from the heathen: it was the means of directing their attention to the Messiah, and of preparing them for the fuller light and liberty of the gospel: it was also the means of their maintaining communion with the Deity, and of obtaining his richest blessings. ^b Rom. vii. 12.

^c Exod. xxx. 23, 25, 34, 35.

^d Mal. i. 8.

sheaves."^e There is scarcely an evil desire, which we have not harboured and indulged. Pride, envy, malice, revenge, covetousness, impurity, and whatever else is hateful unto God, have at all times found a ready admission into our hearts: and if an outward restraint has been imposed upon our actions, it has not proceeded from a fear of God,^f or an hatred of sin, but from a regard to our characters among men, and to the temporal consequences, which we dreaded. When we have known that our dispositions were offensive to God, we have not regarded him, any more than if he had been our slave, that was constrained to bear whatever we might impose upon him: we have altogether contemned him^g as unworthy of our notice, and lived as though there were no such being in the universe.]

Marvellous as this contrast is, we shall be yet more astonished, while we consider

II. God's address to us, founded upon the foregoing representation

The former part of God's address is a free and gracious promise of forgiveness

[What might such rebels have expected, but to hear God say, "Ah! I will ease me of mine enemies;^h I swear in my wrath, that they shall never enter into my rest;ⁱ my fury shall rest upon them, and I will be comforted?"^k But, behold, how different is his voice! "I, even I, whom you have so insulted, degraded, wearied; I, who could in an instant cast you into hell, as I did the rebel angels; I, who might be glorified in your eternal condemnation; even I, am ready to blot out all your transgressions, as a morning cloud: yea, I will blot them out through the blood of my dear Son; and, though I might well "seal them up in a bag," and bring them forth at a future day to your everlasting confusion, I will no more remember them; they shall be perfectly blotted out, even as if they had never been committed. I well know, that if I seek for any thing in you to justify such an act of mercy, I shall never find it: there is nothing in you but what calls for wrath and fiery indignation: yet I will not on this account forbear to exercise mercy; I will pardon thee for *mine own sake*, that I may be glorified in displaying the exceeding riches of my grace."]

How infinitely does this surpass our highest conceptions!

^e Amos ii. 13.

^f Rom. iii. 18.

^g Ps. x. 4, 13.

^h Isaiah i. 24.

ⁱ Ps. xcvi. 10, 11:

^k Ezek. v. 13.

and how obdurate must be the heart that can withstand these overtures of love and mercy!]

The latter part of the address may be understood in a twofold sense

1. As a rebuke to the proud self-justifying Pharisee

[Many, instead of humbling themselves under the charge brought against them, will instantly reply, "Wherein have we wearied thee."^l To such God says, "Since you plead your innocence,^m and stand on your own defence, as though you did not need this offer of mercy, come, and 'put me in remembrance' of your good deeds (for, if you have any to boast of, they have quite escaped my notice) 'Let us plead together, and see whether I am right in my charge, or you in your vindication of yourself:' 'declare thou the grounds of thy dependence,' 'that,' if they will bear thee out in thy confidence, 'thou mayest be justified' before me."ⁿ]

Alas! alas! that the offers of a free salvation should ever be despised through a vain confidence in our own goodness! O that we might not so despise our own mercies! Whatever sentence God shall pass upon us, "he will surely be justified in his saying, and be clear when he is judged."^o Let us not then provoke God to such a contest; for our hope will be only as a spider's web, that shall be swept away with the besom of destruction.^p]

2. As a direction and encouragement to the penitent

[While some put away from them the word of life, because they feel not their need of mercy, others do the same, from an apprehension of their unworthiness to obtain mercy. But God is ever solicitous to encourage the humble, and says, "Put me in remembrance of this promise; come and plead it with me; declare thou thine affiance in it; and, unworthy as thou art, thou shalt be justified." As our Lord vouchsafed to Thomas the evidence of his senses, in order that his doubts might be effectually removed, so he here condescends to the infirmities of his people, in order to bring them to a full conviction of his love and faithfulness. Let this direction then be followed by every doubting, trembling soul. Let us take the Canaanitish woman for our pattern:^q and our confidence shall ere long be crowned with a rich reward.^r]

^l Mal. ii. 17.

^m Jer. ii. 35.

ⁿ Ps. li. 4.

^o Isaiah xxviii. 17.

^p Matt. xv. 26, 27.

^q Heb. x. 35.

CCCCXXXIV. CRIMSON SINS MADE WHITE.

Isaiah i. 18. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

MAN is a rational being; and, though prone to abuse his reason for the vindication of his own evil ways, is capable of judging, when sound argument is proposed for his consideration. Hence God addresses himself to our reason, and makes his appeal to the whole creation, when our pride or obstinacy prevent us from acknowledging the truth of his assertions—The chapter before us exhibits a judicial process—Heaven and earth are called as witnesses against Israel—The charge against them is opened^a—And their vindication of themselves is duly considered^b—Having convicted them of their iniquities, God invites them to come and reason with him, and shews them a better way of pleading for themselves—

It is by his Ministers that he now condescends to reason with mankind. We therefore propose to be to you on this occasion in God's stead, and to argue with you on the two most important of all points, *the necessity* and *the efficacy* of a religious life.

I. The necessity of a religious life

The common reasonings of men on this subject are extremely futile and erroneous

[We are too apt to “confer with flesh and blood,” and to be misled by the suggestions of our own evil hearts. The world around us, and our own corrupt nature unite in asserting, that a life of devotedness to God is *not necessary, not*

^a Ver. 2, 3.

^b Their reply is not set down at length; but it may be gathered from the answer given to it by God. They plead that they have offered sacrifices, yea many, and of the fattest of their flocks—That they have done this themselves, before God, in the temple, with great reverence—That they have presented other offerings also—That they have observed the stated feasts—And that, instead of resting in carnal ceremonies, they had joined with them the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise. God follows them through their objections, and leaves them not a word to add, ver. 11—15.

desirable, not practicable. How can it be imagined, say these objectors, that God should require all persons to live in such a holy self-denying way as the first Christians did. It might be proper for them in the infancy of Christianity to set such an example; but it *cannot be necessary* for us in these times to follow it. And to suppose that all who do not give up themselves to God as they did, are doomed to eternal misery, would be to make God a cruel tyrant, and to rob him of his noblest attributes of goodness and mercy. *Nor is it to be wished*, that religion should operate now as it did then: for how could the affairs of nations be conducted, or the common offices of life be performed? There would be an end to trade, and to all the refinements of civilized society; and men must be brought back again to the simplicity and vacuity of the Patriarchal age———In short, it *cannot be effected* now. A few visionaries and enthusiasts may experience something, and pretend to a great deal more: but to eradicate from the breast the love of sin, and to raise the soul above all the things of time and sense, and to bring it into a state of habitual communion with God, is impossible; unless we were all to be set apart to the work of religion, just as the Apostles were, and had nothing else to attend to———

Such are the reasonings of flesh and blood. But here is little else than mere unfounded assertion, which is contradicted by every page of the holy scriptures, and by the actual experience of thousands.]

Let us now, in God's name, reason with you on the same subject

[*Has not God done enough to merit all the services that you can possibly render him?* Think of what he has done for you in creation and providence, and, above all, in the work of Redemption, and then say, whether there "be any thing which he could have done for you more than he has;" or whether if he had permitted you to ask whatever you would as the price of your services, you could have ventured to have asked a thousandth part of what he has already done for you? Could you have dared to make such a request as that he would give you his dear Son to die for you, and his Holy Spirit to instruct and sanctify you?———

Has he not promised you assistance for the performance of every thing he has required of you? We acknowledge your impotency for that which is good: but that is no excuse for your disobedience, while he says, "My grace shall be sufficient for you." If his grace wrought effectually in the saints of old, it cannot but be as sufficient for you as for them———

Will not his love and favour amply compensate for all that you can either do or suffer for him? I might ask this ques-

tion in reference to the tokens of his favour which he would give you *now*; but how much more *hereafter!* Can it be imagined that one saint in glory ever had the thought pass through his mind, that his reward was an inadequate recompence for his former labours? — — —

Will not all of you at a future period wish that you had dedicated yourselves unreservedly to God? Many begin to express that wish on their dying bed; though many are so insensible even to the last, as to feel no regret upon the subject. But what does the soul of every man wish, the very instant it is separated from his body? If we could hear it speak then, we can have no doubt what its language would be. If it had not been convinced before, we have no doubt it is convinced *then*, that former reasonings were vain and delusive— — —

Much more we might easily urge in God's name; but this is sufficient to convince any one who is open to conviction, that an entire surrender of ourselves to God is a good and "reasonable service."]

From the latter clause of the text we are led to reason more especially with you respecting

II. The efficacy of a religious life

Men driven from the false refuges of presumption, are ready to run into the contrary extreme of despondency; and, when convinced of the necessity of a holy life, to doubt, whether any efforts on their part will succeed for the attainment of eternal happiness.

Here, as before, let us briefly consider the reasonings of flesh and blood

[Many, under a sense of their past transgressions, will say, that it is too late for them to turn to God; that they have sinned away their day of grace; that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost; and that God has already sealed them up to final impenitence, and to everlasting condemnation— — —

But here, as in the former instance, is nothing but assertion, founded on unwarrantable surmises and groundless fears. We know that such persons will appeal to scripture: but by what authority do they apply to themselves passages that have no real reference to their state, and make use of those passages to invalidate the plainest assertions of holy writ? If only they desire to come to God, they have an express assurance from God, that "he will in no wise cast them out."]

Let us again, in God's name, oppose these reasonings by others that are more substantial

[*Is not God a God of infinite mercy and compassion?* Search the scriptures: see the representations which he gives of himself: how often is it said, "His mercy endureth for ever!" If then "he delighteth in mercy," who are we that we should presume to limit him in the exercise of it towards ourselves?— — —

Do not his promises extend to all the sins that you have ever committed? You know that he hath said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Moreover, read the words of our text; and doubt if you can. But, perhaps, you will reply, that the sin against the Holy Ghost is excepted; and that that is the sin which you have committed. To that we answer, that if you desire to repent and turn unto God, It is not possible that you should have committed it; because, if you had committed it, you would have arrived at such a degree of obduracy, that you would glory in your shame, and never wish to repent at all— — —

Have not the vilest of sinners already found acceptance with God? Look at the character given of the Corinthians; and see whether you can be in a worse state than they: yet "they were washed and sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."^a If you are alarmed about backslidings after conversion, see whether you have been worse than David and Peter: yet they were restored to the divine favour as soon as ever they repented themselves of their iniquities. And myriads of others, once as vile as they, are at this very moment around the throne of God, rejoicing and triumphing in redeeming love. What bar then can there be to your acceptance through "him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood?"— — —
[We forbear to urge other considerations, because if you can withstand these, there is no hope than any others could be urged with effect.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who still hold out against God

[We call heaven and earth to witness against you, that you are most unreasonable creatures. The ox and the ass are indeed more rational, than you are in relation to your souls. They seek their true interests, and acknowledge their benefactor: would to God that you might be brought to do the same!]

2. Those who are convinced by his reasonings

[Beware how you listen to the dictates of flesh and blood. You know how you have been deceived; be on your guard against fresh deceits. Regard not the laughter of a blind in-

^a 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

fatuated world. They may call you mad; but they, and they only, are "come to themselves," who have been brought to say, "I will return and go to my Father."]

CCCCXXXV. THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

2 Cor. v. 19, 20. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God.

NATURAL as well as revealed religion teaches us that God is the author and giver of all good things. He originally formed man out of the dust of the earth, and still brings us into existence in our successive generations. He appoints the time and place of our birth: he bestows the talents we severally possess: he preserves the health of our bodies, and the vigour of our minds: "in him we altogether live, and move, and have our being." Nor is it less evident that redemption also is the work of his hands: for he formed the plan alone, and executed it without the creatures aid. He sent his Son; and qualified him for his office; and upheld him in it. He laid our iniquities on him; and accepted his vicarious sacrifice; and commissioned his apostles to declare these tidings to the world. All this is plainly asserted in the passage before us; from which we shall

I. Shew what God has done to save us

There are two things particularly specified in the text,

1. He has wrought salvation for us

[Man in innocence walked with God as a friend; but, as soon as he had fallen, shunned his presence, and fled from him as an enemy. Since that time "the carnal and unrenewed mind has been in a state of enmity against God;" and all the children of men have shewn themselves "enemies to God in their minds by wicked works." To effect a reconciliation for themselves was impossible:- but God, in his infinite mercy, opened a way for their restoration to his favour. He assumed our nature, and, in the person of Jesus Christ, be-

came our substitute and surety; that, by his own obedience to the law which we had broken, and his enduring of the penalties which we had incurred, he might make satisfaction to his injured Justice, and pardon us without any dishonour to himself. By this means "he has reconciled the world unto himself;" "nor will he impute to any their trespasses," if they will accept the reconciliation which he offers them.]

2. He has sent salvation to us

[God has in every age raised up men to whom "he has committed the word of reconciliation," on purpose that they might publish it to their fellow-creatures. He has not committed it to angels, whose presence would confound us, and who, from their never having tasted the bitterness of sin, would probably be unable to sympathize with us: but he has appointed those to speak to us, who are "encompassed with the same infirmities," and who need the same forgiveness, as ourselves. To these "he has given the ministry of reconciliation." He sends them forth, not to tell men how to purchase his favour, or how (as the common expression is) *to make their peace with God*; but to inform them, that "Christ is our peace," and that "God, for Christ's sake, is ready to forgive us all our trespasses." This is the sum and substance of the gospel. This is the "treasure which God hath put into us earthen vessels," for the enriching of the poor, and the saving of the lost. And, in having thus sent the tidings of salvation home to our own doors, he has done what will leave us without excuse for ever.]

That such grace may not be displayed in vain, let us

II. Urge you to accept salvation

The message we are commissioned to deliver to you, is, "Be reconciled to God"

[Acknowledge that you have indeed been enemies to God. Surely none of us can doubt whether such have been our state. Let us only look back upon our violations of his law, and they will bear ample testimony to this melancholy truth.

Being convinced of your enmity against God, be humbled for it in dust and ashes. It is not possible to bewail too deeply the guilt which you have thus contracted.

Be careful too to seek reconciliation with God in the way which he has pointed out. Beware of attempting to make satisfaction, as it were, for your sins; for you owe ten thousand talents, and cannot pay one single mite. God in Christ has taken your debt upon himself; and he is willing "frankly to forgive you

all." Go to him then, and receive mercy at his hands "without money, and without price."^a]

As ambassadors of Christ we would urge our suit with becoming earnestness

[Though we are neither inspired, nor empowered to work miracles, like the apostles of old, yet are we truly "ambassadors from Christ" to a guilty world; and we come in his name and stead to treat with you respecting peace. We proclaim an eternal amnesty, if you return to your allegiance: and though, as God's representatives, we might command, yet after Christ's example, "we beseech you to be reconciled to God."

And is this an unreasonable request? Is it not, on the contrary, most reasonable that you should be reconciled to him, who never afforded you any just cause of complaint; and, who has never rendered any thing to you but good, in return for all the evil you have done against him? Is it not madness to continue in rebellion against him, who must prevail at last? And is it not better to bow to the sceptre of his grace, than to be "broken in pieces with his rod of iron?"

What would you reply, if God should intreat you by a voice from heaven? would you still refuse? Know then, that "God himself beseeches you by us;" and if you continue to pour contempt on *this* mercy, your "punishment will be sore" indeed.]

APPLICATION

[What account now shall we give to him who sent us? Must we return and say, "Lord, we have spoken to them; but they will not hear; we have invited; but they all begin with one consent to make excuse?" O think with yourselves, how soon "this day of acceptance and salvation" may be passed; and how aggravated will be your condemnation, if you reject these overtures of mercy! Let not our embassy be unsuccessful; but be prevailed upon to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near." Remember however that, if you be restored to God's favour, you must also be reconciled to his government: you must not assume a subject's name, and retain a rebel's heart: if you "name the name of Christ, you must depart from all iniquity.")

^a Some have thought that because *we* are called upon to be reconciled to *God*, the enmity subsists only on *our* part. But not to mention a multitude of passages that represent God as "angry with the wicked," the very term *diakolayzō* is used by our Lord himself as expressive of the offending party seeking pardon from the offended, Matt. v. 24.

CCCCXXXVI. INVITATION TO BACKSLIDERS.

Jer. iii. 22. Return, ye back-sliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the Lord our God.

THOUGH the conversion of men is the result of God's purpose, and solely the effect of his grace, yet it is wrought by rational means—He calls upon them as free agents, and enforces his exhortations with the most cogent motives—By these means he convinces their judgment, and makes them willing to comply with his solicitations—In the preceding context he had determined to effect his purpose by the constraining influence of his grace; nevertheless he does not omit the use of means, but repeats his former invitations with still stronger arguments than before—In this way he produces the change upon the reluctant soul, and makes it thankfully to embrace his proffered mercy—

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider

I. The Lord's address to backsliders

The persons addressed are either mere nominal Christians, or real Christians in a declining state

[The term “backsliding” refers to an unruly heifer that either will not at all draw in its master's yoke, or that performs its work unsteadily^a—*In the former view*, it comprehends all those who in name and profession are his, but in reality are altogether regardless of his will—Alas! how many are there of this description in every place!—Who amongst us may not consider the text as addressed to himself in particular?—Who has not cast off the yoke of God, and said, like Pharaoh, “I know not the Lord, neither will I obey his voice?”—*In the latter view*, it may describe those who, having begun to serve the Lord, turn back again in some measure to the world and to sin—And where is there a child of God who must not acknowledge himself to have been, at some time, of this number, however diligently he be serving God at this moment?—Who can say that he has invariably, from the very first, pursued the path of duty in one uniform

^a Hos. iv. 16

tenor of conduct?—Who has not often been conscious of secret declensions, and “backslidings of heart?”—]

To both these descriptions of people does God address an earnest and impressive exhortation

[God well knows the danger to which all are exposed when they have turned aside from him—Nor does he “will, in any instance, the death of a sinner, but rather that he should return and live”—Hence, instead of saying, as we might well expect, Depart from me, he invites us to return—He would have us not only to take his yoke upon us, but to draw in it with pleasure and delight—To enforce his exhortation, he adds a most encouraging promise—Well might he threaten us with the dreadful consequences of our transgression, and address himself only to our fears—But he is a God of infinite compassion, and would rather win us by love—Our backslidings have made a deadly wound in our souls, a wound which, if not speedily closed, will destroy us for ever—Behold, what astonishing mercy! he promises to heal us; to heal the guilt of our sin by the blood of Jesus, and the power of it by his good Spirit—Such is his gracious declaration to us at this instant; and such is the encouragement which he affords to all who have departed from him—]

Having seen the condescension of God, we can be at no loss to determine

II. The effect it should produce upon us

If we have the smallest spark of ingenuity within us, his goodness must of necessity produce

1. A ready compliance with his will

[Such was the effect upon those addressed in the text—And, whenever the word is applied with power to our souls, the same effect will be visible on us—We shall no longer keep at a distance from God, but return to him with our whole hearts—Filled with astonishment at his forbearance towards us, and solicitous to experience the renewed expressions of his favour, we shall say, “Behold we come unto thee”—No pleasures of sin will be suffered to detain us from him—Having “tasted the gall and wormwood of a backslidden state, our souls will have them still in remembrance”—We shall determine with the church of old, “I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now”^b—]

2. An unreserved surrender of ourselves to his service

[The love of Christ has a constraining power, which, if not irresistibly, yet invincibly impels us to live unto him—Let

it once be “shed abroad in our hearts,” and we shall instantly exclaim with rapture, “My Lord, and my God”—“What have I to do any more with idols,” will be the natural effusion of our souls—We shall feel an holy indignation at the thought of having so long “provoked the Lord to jealousy;” and shall address him in the language of his repenting people, Other Lords beside thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name^d]—

APPLICATION

1. To those who are deliberately resisting the will of God

[While casting off the restraints of God’s law, and following the dictates of your own will, you conceive yourselves to be enjoying perfect liberty—But such liberty is the sorest bondage—A subjection to sin is a vassalage most abject in its nature, and most fatal in its consequences—Would to God that the slaves of sin would reflect a moment what master they are serving, and what wages they are likely to receive!—Soon would they then cast off the yoke which their own lusts have imposed, and seek for freedom in the service of their God—Awake, ye deluded sinners, and return to him, whose “yoke is easy, and whose burthen is light”]

2. To those who, having begun to serve God, are drawing back from him

[“Who hath bewitched,” who hath infatuated your depraved hearts?—“Hath God been a wilderness to you,” that you are tired of his service?^g—“Is there indeed no profit in serving him?”—We will venture to put the matter to this issue, Are you as happy now in your departure from God, as you were when you were endeavouring to walk with him?—Has your return to secret neglects and sinful indulgences been attended with a proportionate increase of peace and comfort?—Sure we are that none can truly affirm this to have been their experience—If your consciences be not altogether seared, your wounds are festering at this instant—Beware then lest God leave you to be “filled with your own ways”^h—That would be the greatest curse that can be inflicted on you—O return immediately to God; and he will heal your backslidings and love you freely!—]

3. To those who are maintaining a stedfast walk with God

[Thrice happy souls! ye are highly favoured of the Lord—

^e Hos. xiv. 8.

^d Isaiah xxvi. 13.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 19.

^f Rom. vi. 16.

^g Jer. ii. 5, 31.

^h Prov. xiv. 14.

ⁱ Hos. xiv. 4.

Say, Have ye not already the recompense in your own bosoms? Is not his service perfect freedom?—Be thankful then to God who enables you so to live—Be fearful of any thing which may “grieve that Holy Spirit, by whom ye are sealed”—Watch against secret backslidings in their very first beginnings—Be more and more diligent in every good word and work—“ Be stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and be assured that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord”—]

CCCCXXXVII. THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED TO US.

Deut. xi. 18—21. Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates. That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.

TO have the holy oracles in our hands is one of the greatest advantages that we enjoy above the heathen:^a a due improvement of them therefore will be expected of us. The Jews, who were in like manner distinguished above all other nations upon earth, were required to shew the most affectionate, obediential regard to the writings of Moses. But the injunctions given to them with respect to the revelation they professed, are still more obligatory on us, who have the sacred canon completed, and, by the superior light of the New Testament, are enabled to enter more fully into its mysterious import.

The words which we have just read point out to us
I. Our duty with respect to the word of God

A revelation from heaven cannot but demand our most serious attention

^a Rom. iii. 2.

1. We should treasure it up in our hearts

[It is not sufficient to study the scriptures merely as we do other books; we must search into them for hid treasures,^b and lay up "in our hearts," yea, in our inmost "souls," the glorious truths which they unfold to our view; and be careful never to let them slip.^c They should be our delight, and our meditation all the day.^d]

2. We should make it a frequent subject of our conversation

[It is to be regretted that there is no other subject so universally prescribed and banished, as that of religion. But, if we loved God as we ought, we could not but love to speak of his word, that word which is our light in this dark world, and the one foundation of all our hopes. When Moses and Elias came from heaven to converse with our Lord, the prophecies relating to the sufferings and glory of Christ were their one topic of discourse.^e Thus at all times and places should our conversation be seasoned with salt,^f and tend to the use of edifying.^g If it were thus with us, God would listen to us with approbation,^h and Jesus would often come and unite himself to our company.ⁱ]

3. We should bring it on all occasions to our remembrance.

[The Jews, putting a literal construction on the passage before us, wrote portions of God's word on scraps of parchment, and wore them as bracelets on their wrists, and as frontlets on their heads. But we shall more truly answer the end of this commandment by consulting the scriptures on all occasions as our sure and only guide. There are many general precepts and promises which we should have continually in view, as much as if they were fixed on our doors and gates; which also, as if fastened on our foreheads and our hands, should both direct our way, and regulate our actions.]

4. We should instruct the rising generation in the knowledge of it

[All are solicitous to teach their children some business, whereby they may provide a maintenance for their bodies; and should we not endeavour to instruct them in the things relating to their souls? Abraham was particularly commended for his care with respect to this:^k and the injunction in the text, confirmed by many other passages,^l requires that we

^b Prov. ii. 1—4.

^c Heb. ii. 1.

^d Ps. cxix. 92, 97.

^e Luke ix. 30, 31.

^f Col. iv. 6.

^g Eph. iv. 29.

^h Mal. iii. 16, 17.

ⁱ Luke xxiv. 14, 15.

^l Gen. xviii. 19.

^j Exod. xiii. 8, 15—16. Ps. lxxviii. 5—8.

should "diligently" perform this duty. Nor should we imagine that the mere teaching of children to repeat a catechism will suffice: we should open to them all the wonders of redemption, and endeavour to cast their minds, as it were, into the very mould of the gospel.]

In the close of the text we are directed to bear in mind

II. Our encouragement to fulfil this duty

This unfeigned love to the scriptures will be productive of the greatest good

1. It will tend greatly to our present happiness

[A peaceful enjoyment of the promised land, and of all the good things of this life, was held forth to the Jews as the reward of their obedience: but we are taught rather to look forward to the possession of a better country, that is, an heavenly. Nevertheless, "godliness has at this time also the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;"^m and therefore we may properly consider the present benefits arising from a due attention to the scriptures. Suppose then that the blessed word of God were regarded by us as it ought to be, that it engaged our affections, entered into our conversation, regulated our conduct, and were instilled into the minds of the rising generation, would not much light, obscene, and impious discourse be suppressed? Would not sin of every kind receive a severe check? Would not many of the diseases, the troubles, the feuds, and the miseries that result from sin, be prevented? Would not many of the judgments of God which now desolate the earth, the wars, the famines, the pestilences, be removed?ⁿ Would not, in numberless instances, knowledge be diffused, consolation administered, and virtue called forth into act and exercise? Would not our children, as they grow up, reap the benefit of such examples?^o Let any one judge impartially, and say, whether a due regard to the scriptures would not greatly meliorate the state of society, and of every individual, in proportion as his life was conformed to them?^q]

2. It will secure an inheritance beyond the grave

[The earthly Canaan was typical of heaven; when therefore we see the possession of that good land promised to the Jews, we must, in applying the promises to ourselves, raise our views to the Canaan that is above. Now what are the means which God has prescribed for the securing of that glo-

^m 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^o Prov. xxii. 6.

ⁿ Ver. 13—17.

^p Ps. xix. 11.

rious inheritance? Certainly an attention to the scriptures is that one mean, without which we never can attain to happiness, and in the use of which we cannot but attain it. It is by the scriptures that God quickens us,^p and brings us first into his family.^r It is by them that he directs our way,^s and keeps our feet,^t and sanctifies our hearts,^u and makes us wise unto salvation.^v

And shall not the hope of such benefits allure us? When we have eternal life in the scriptures, shall we not search them,^y yea, and meditate upon them day and night?^z Let then the word be sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb,^a and be esteemed by us more than our necessary food.^{b*}]

^q Ps. xix. 7, 8. and cxix. 50.

^r Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23. See also Acts viii. 28—39.

^s Ps. cxix. 105.

^t Ps. cxix. 9, 11. and xxxvii. 31.

^u Eph. v. 26.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^y John v. 39.

^z Ps. i. 2.

^a Ps. xix. 10.

^b Job xxiii. 12.

* If this were the subject of a Sermon for *Sunday Schools*, or *Charity Schools*, or the distribution of *Bibles and religious tracts*, an APPLICATION, suited to the occasion, should be added.

CCCCXXXVIII. THE WAY OF ATTAINING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

Prov. ii. 1—6. *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

WISDOM is justly considered as the first of human attainments—It is that which elevates us in the scale of being—And to it we are indebted for all the most refined comforts of civilized society—But there is a spiritual wisdom totally distinct from that which is merely intellectual, and as much superior to it both in its qualities and effects, as reason is superior to instinct—What this is, and how it is to be attained, we are informed by Solomon in the words before us—Let us then consider

I. Wherein true wisdom consists

The nature of true wisdom is plainly declared in the text

[That which in one verse is called, “Wisdom,” and “Understanding,” in a subsequent verse is called, “The fear of the Lord,” and “The knowledge of God”—The wisdom which unregenerate men possess, is seated only in the head; but that, of which the text speaks, is seated in the heart—The former consists merely in a knowledge of men and things, with a faculty of applying that knowledge to present circumstances: but the latter consists in a knowledge of God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, together with a correspondent fear and love of his name—The former enlarges the mind, and directs the conduct in things relating to time: the latter informs and regulates the soul in reference to eternity.]

This description is just and accurate

[We confess that the knowledge and fear of God is not so reputed by the world: on the contrary, it is stigmatized as folly and madness—But that which arrogates to itself an exclusive title to the appellation of wisdom, is by no means so deserving of it as this: because, whatever excellencies it possesses, its operations are weak, uncertain, transient: whereas “the wisdom that is from above” brings into subjection every rebellious passion, and progressively prepares us for the enjoyment of our God—It was with this wisdom that the Messiah himself was endued^a—And it is of this that Solomon speaks, when he declares that nothing else is worthy the name of wisdom^b]—

Respecting wisdom the text further informs us

II. By what means it is to be attained

The wisdom of this world may be gained by study only; but spiritual wisdom requires

1. Sincerity

[If a man have not a disposition to obey the word of God, he will find occasion of cavil and dispute in the plainest expressions—The Pharisees of old, though conversant with the sacred writings, and instructed by our Lord himself, remained ignorant of the truth, because “they loved darkness rather than light”—Thus it will be with us—However good the seed that is sown may be, it will never bring forth fruit to perfection, unless it be “received into an honest and good heart”—If we would be truly wise, we must imitate the docility of Cornelius;^c or, in the language of the text, we must “re-

^a Isaiah xi. 2, 3.

^b Prov. ix. 10.

^c Acts x. 33.

ceive God's word, and hide his commandments with us," as an inestimable jewel which we are solicitous to possess and keep—]

2. Diligence

[This idea is strongly inculcated in the words before us; "we should incline our ear, and apply our heart to understanding, and seek it as silver, and search for it as for hid treasures." We should consider the inspired volume as an inexhaustible mine, which yields nothing to a superficial observer, but will richly repay those who explore its inmost recesses—To this effect was the direction given to Joshua^d—And if we follow that direction, we shall succeed like the Beræans of old^e—It is the diligent hand, and that only, that can ever make us rich—]

3. Prayer

[Nothing will succeed without prayer—A man might commit to memory the whole Bible, and yet not understand one spiritual truth contained in it, if he trusted in his own powers, instead of looking up to God for the teaching of his Spirit. Our blessed Lord assures us, that none knoweth the Father, but he to whom the Son shall reveal him^f—And this also is intimated in the repeated direction given us in the text, to "cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding"—The apostles themselves needed to have "their understandings opened, before they could understand the scriptures"^g—Yea, established Christians still needed "a spirit of wisdom and revelation to be given" to them, in order to their obtaining a juster view of revealed truths^h—All of us therefore, if we would be taught of God, must cry with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"ⁱ]—

For the encouragement of all, Solomon further declares

III. The certain issue of those means

God is the source and giver of all spiritual knowledge

[Nothing can be more positive than the assertion before us, That "God giveth wisdom, and that out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding"—It is in this view that he is called, "The Father of lights;"^k because as that bright luminary, the sun, was the work of his hands, so all light, intellectual or spiritual, is derived from him—Human learning

^d Josh. i. 8.

^e Acts xvii. 11.

^f Matt. xi. 27.

^g Luke xxiv. 45.

^h Eph. i. 17, 18.

ⁱ Ps. cxix. 18.

^k Jam. i. 17.

gives a man no advantage towards the attainment of true wisdom—All, under God, depends on the state of mind with which men seek divine knowledge: if they be willing to “learn of the Father,”¹ he will teach them: if they be too proud to submit to his instructions, he will leave them to wander further and further from the right way—He will “take the wise in their own craftiness,”² and “reveal to babes what he hides from the wise and prudent”³]—]

Nor will he suffer us to use the appointed means in vain

[Frequent are the assurances which God has given us respecting this^o—And he has made distinct promises to each of the foregoing means—Are we sincere? he will open our eyes^p—Are we diligent? he will reveal himself to us^q—Are we importunate in prayer? he will give us liberally, and without upbraiding^r—No want of learning, no weakness of intellect, shall be any obstacle to him, or deprive us of the benefits which we seek^s—On the contrary, he will make use of the weakest and most contemptible of men to confound the wise and mighty^t]—

INFER

1. How highly should we value a preached gospel!

[Men spend much time and money in acquiring human knowledge, and are glad to avail themselves of all lectures, public or private, whereby they may gain instruction—But a frequent ministration of divine ordinances; and a faithful dispensation of God’s word; are deemed worthy of censure rather than of approbation; and the very persons for whose benefit the word is preached, can scarcely be prevailed upon to lend an ear to the instruction that is freely offered—Little do they think what it is that they thus despise—The ordinances are appointed of God for the express purpose of “converting souls, and making wise the simple”^u—How many are there now in heaven, who would have “perished for lack of knowledge, if the voice of God in his ministers had not reached their hearts, and “brought them out of darkness into marvellous light!”^v—Let all then improve the ordinances with diligence, and pray that by means of them they may be “made wise unto salvation”^w]—]

¹ John vi. 45.

^m 1 Cor. i. 19. & iii. 19.

ⁿ Matt. xi. 25.

² Ps. xxv. 9, 12, 14.

^p John vii. 17.

^q Prov. viii. 17.

^f Jam. i. 5.

^s Isaiah xxxv. 8.

^t 1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

^g Job xxiii. 12. Ps. xix. 7. ^x 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^y 1 Pet. ii. 2. Heb. ii. 1.

2. How precious should the scriptures be in our sight!

[It is only at certain seasons that we can attend on public ordinances: but the scriptures we may read at all times—In them is contained all that we need to know—And the Holy Spirit is promised us, to guide us into all truth^a—Let the sacred volume then be our delight, and our meditation all the day^a—Let us not cavil at any part of it, or say, This is an hard saying;^b but let us receive it with meekness, knowing that if it be engrrafted in our hearts, it is able, and shall be effectual, to save our souls^c]—

^a John xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^b John vi. 60.

^a Ps. i. 2.

^c Jam. i. 21.

CCCCXXXIX. THE NATURE AND EXCELLENCE OF TRUE WISDOM.

Prov. iv. 7. *Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.*

THE inspired volume is no less useful in rectifying the prejudices of education, than it is in restraining the indulgence of forbidden appetites—As far as relates to the grosser violations of moral duty, the advice of parents and teachers is in unison with the holy scriptures—But we are very rarely exhorted to follow that which is the main end and purpose of life—Get wealth, get honour, are the lessons inculcated on all the rising generation—David however sets us a better example—He earnestly intreated his son above all things to cultivate true religion—And Solomon, having reaped much advantage from those instructions, has left them on record for our benefit^a—We shall endeavour

I. To shew the nature and excellence of true wisdom
That which is usually termed wisdom is far from being the object so extolled in the text

[We mean not to deprecate the attainments of art or science—They are valuable in themselves, and, if duly im-

proved, may, like the Egyptian gold, enrich and beautify the sanctuary of God—But the wisdom spoken of in the text, has respect entirely to spiritual things—]

True wisdom is the proposing of the best ends and prosecuting of them by the fittest means

[There is no *end* so worthy to be pursued by a rational creature, as the sanctification and salvation of his own soul—Nor are there any *means* of attaining it so proper, as those prescribed in the holy scriptures—To repent of all our sins, to flee to Christ for the pardon of them, and to seek the renovation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit, are represented as the only effectual means of salvation—These things, it must be confessed, are often called folly—But they are called so only by those, who have never known them by experience—Not one among the holy angels would account it folly to love and serve God—None of the redeemed in heaven regret that they were once so strenuous in the exercise of religion—The saints on earth are precisely of the same mind with those in heaven—Hence conversion to an holy life is called “a turning of the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just^b”—Even devils and damned spirits would confess that devotedness of heart to God is the truest wisdom—Careless sinners are the only beings who dissent from this truth—And they in a little time will assuredly alter their opinion^c]—

Such wisdom is justly termed “the principal thing”

[There are many other things that are important in their place—But this is far superior to them all—Riches cannot be put in competition with it^d—Pleasure, honour, or even life itself, are not worthy to be compared with it^e—It excels every thing else as much as light excelleth darkness^f—This exclusively deserves the name of wisdom, God himself being witness^g—It is “the good part”^h—And he alone can be called truly wise, who, like Paul, accounts every thing but loss for that unspeakably excellent attainmentⁱ]—

Its excellency being thus established, we may proceed

II. To urge upon you the diligent pursuit of it

In the text, with the preceding context, we may see the utmost fervour that language can express—May we

^b Luke i. 17.

^c Wisdom v. 4. What do these rich men, Luke xii. 19, 20. and xvi. 19, 23. now think of their once envied state?

^d Job xxviii. 12—19. ^e Prov. iii. 13—18. ^f Eccl. ii. 13.

^g Job xxviii. 28.

^h Luke x. 42.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 7, 8.

be animated with the same, while we labour to impress the subject on your minds by the following considerations!

—Consider then

1. This wisdom is both more easily, and more certainly, to be attained than any thing else

[With respect to other things, every one has not a capacity for making great attainments—Nor have all, who possess good abilities, an opportunity of cultivating them to advantage—Nor can great industry united with great talents, always insure success^b—But no man ever sought this in vain—The poor fishermen of Galilee were as capable of comprehending it, as the philosophers of Greece and Rome—We attain it, not by the mere exertion of our own powers, but by the teachings of God's Spirit^c—Nor will he ever refuse that heavenly gift to any who seek it with a teachable and childlike disposition^m—This thought may well encourage all—May we be stirred up by it to seek the unction that shall teach us all things!ⁿ—Then will God bestow upon us his promised blessing^o—And make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ^p]—

2. There is nothing else which will so conduce to our *present* happiness

[The creature is justly represented as a cistern that will hold no water^q—All who seek happiness in it are disappointed—Even science itself, which is the most rational of all earthly pleasures, is often a source of sorrow and vexation^r—But true wisdom is an over-flowing fountain of joy—In prosperity, it adds a zest to all our comforts; and in adversity, a balm to all our sorrows—In a time of pain and trouble more especially its excellency appears—What can earthly things do to assuage our anguish or compose our minds?^s—But religion enables us to see the rod in our Father's hand, and to know that all is working for our good^t—St. Paul found it to be wealth in poverty, joy in sorrow, life in death^u—And such will every Christian experience it to be in the hour of trial^x—Shall not this consideration then quicken our diligence in the pursuit of it?]—

3. There is nothing besides this that can in the least promote our *eternal* welfare

[Our duties, when performed with an eye to God, are a part of religion itself—But, independent of the respect which

^b Eccl. ix. 11.

^c John i. 13. and vi. 45.

^m James i. 5.

^d 1 John ii. 20.

^e Prov. ii. 1—6.

^p 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^g Jer. iii. 13.

^r Eccl. i. 17, 18.

^s Ecc. 17.

^t Rom. viii. 28.

^u 2 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^x Prov. iii. 21—26.

we have to him in the performance of them, they are of no value in his sight—A person may do many things that are beneficial to society, and yet be dead in trespasses and sins—But Solomon, specifying the supreme excellency of wisdom, affirms, that it giveth life to them that have it^y—No man can perish that possesses wisdom—Nor can any man be saved who is destitute of it^z—Shall we not then be prevailed upon to seek it?—Shall we disregard the commendations that David and Solomon have given of it?—And shall their importunity be treated by us with coldness and neglect?—Surely such a conduct may well expose us to the most severe of all reflections^a]*

“Suffer then a word of EXHORTATION”

[The wisdom here spoken of is not the *only* thing in the world that is desirable; nor the *only* thing that you may laudably pursue—There are innumerable other things which demand our attention; and which our several conditions in life render necessary—The text itself supposes, or rather enjoins, that we should labour to get other things—But wisdom is indisputably “the *principal* thing;” and “with all our getting we must be mindful to get understanding”—Whatever else be neglected, this must not—It is “the one thing needful”—Therefore, “get it, get it, get it, get it”^b—“Forsake it not, neither forget it; exalt it, love it, and embrace it; so shall it be an ornament of grace to your head, and a crown of glory to your soul”—For whoso findeth it findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord^c]

^y Eccl. vii. 12. ^z Rom. viii. 6, 13. ^a Prov. xvii. 16.

* If this were the subject of a *Commemoration-Sermon*, the intention of the founder, and the obligations necessarily attaching to every member of the society, might be urged as a *fourth* and *more appropriate* consideration to enforce the royal precept given in the text.

^b Four times is this repeated, ver. 5, 7. ^c Prov. viii. 35.

CCCCXL. THE DUTY OF SEEKING GOD.

Hosea x. 12. *Scw to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*

THE figurative language of scripture may in some cases obscure its import: but, when it is explained, it exhibits the plainest truths in a rich variety of forms, and

tends to fix them on our minds by its attractive influence. We pray God that this observation may be verified, while we open the passage now before us, and consider

I. The duty enjoined

The three first expressions are explained by the prophet himself as collectively importing, that we should “seek the Lord;” but, separately taken, they point out the particular manner in which we should seek him:

1. In the performance of his will

[Though no man ever hopes to reap wheat, where he has sowed only tares, almost all expect to obtain heaven, notwithstanding they have never made it the one object of their pursuit. But the apostle guards us against this fatal error, and assures us, that we shall reap according to what we have sowed.^a Would we then have a joyful harvest in the day of judgment, let us not be provoking God by a life of sin; but turn to him in the way of righteousness; nor let us regard the duties of the first or second table only; but labour to fulfil all his will uniformly and without reserve.]

2. In a dependence on his mercy

[As there are many who hope to find acceptance with God, notwithstanding they seek him not at all, so are there many, who think they make God their debtor by the works they perform; and that they can earn heaven, as it were by their own righteousness. But, however we may “sow in righteousness,” we must “reap in mercy.” Death is the *wages* of sin: but life is not the *wages* of righteousness; all our righteousness are imperfect:^b our best deeds are mixed with sin: and therefore we must be contented to accept heaven as the unmerited *gift* of God through Jesus Christ.^c]

3. In a due preparation of heart to receive his blessings

[It would be in vain for a man to sow his seed on fallow ground. The very rains, which God might send down upon it, would be of no service, if the ground were not purged of its weeds, nor the seed buried in the bosom of the earth. Thus neither can the soul make a just improvement of spiritual blessings, unless it be broken up, as it were, by the divine law. Till this be done, the true way of salvation will appear foolishness. To be diligent in working righteousness, and, after all, to depend on mere mercy, will be thought paradoxical and absurd. But, when once the law is brought home to the con-

^a Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^b Isaiah lxiv. 6.

^c Rom. vi. 23. Phil. iii. 9.

science in its spirituality and extent, the soul is made willing to submit to the righteousness of God; and yet is induced to purify itself even as God is pure. It was by this means that St. Paul was brought to a right mind;^d nor is there any other way of combining diligence in exertion with an humble dependence on the divine favour.^{e]}

For the impressing of this duty on our minds, let us consider

II. The arguments with which it is enforced

Confining ourselves to the hints suggested in the text, we shall pass by many obvious and important arguments and fix our attention upon

1. The urgency of this duty

[At the proper seasons the husbandman goes forth to plow or sow his ground, knowing that, if his work be neglected till the time for performing it be past, he shall have reason to repent of his neglect in the day of harvest. Let it be remembered then, that this is the “time to seek the Lord.” Are we advanced in years? Surely we have no time to lose. Are we in the early part of life? What time so fit as that of youth, before our habits be fixed, or our conscience seared, or our minds distracted by worldly cares? As for aged persons, their lives must be drawing to a speedy close; or, if protracted for a while, a want of mental energy will unfit their souls for spiritual exertions. And, with respect to those who are in the midst of youth, for aught they know, there may be “but a step between them and death.” If any feel a disposition to serve the Lord, this is in a peculiar manner the time for them to seek his face. The very desire they feel, is an evidence that God himself is working in them,^f and ready to reveal himself to them: whereas, if they stifle the motions of his Spirit, they know not that the grace they so despise shall be ever offered them again.^g Let us then “redeem the time” that is so precious,^h and improve the season which God has afforded us for this important work.]

2. The certainty of success in it

[The husbandman knows that, if his seed be not watered by seasonable rains, his labour will be wholly lost: yet, notwithstanding he cannot command the showers, he performs his labour, in hope that God will graciously send the former and the latter rain. But we have an absolute promise, that God will prosper our endeavours, and that, “to him who

^d Rom. vii. 9.

^e Gal. ii. 19. Rom. vii. 4.

^f Phil. ii. 13.

^g Gen. vi. 3.

^h Eph. v. 16.

soweth righteousness shall be a *sure reward.*ⁱ Do we want a righteousness to justify us before God? He will clothe us in the unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness.^k Do we want an inward righteousness to qualify us for the enjoyment of his presence? He will work it in us by his good Spirit, and transform us into his own blessed image.^l Yea, he will "rain down righteousness upon us," giving us "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness."^m Let this then encourage us; for "none ever sought his face in vain."ⁿ]

APPLICATION

[Let us begin the first great work, the plowing up of our fallow ground. We need not be told either the necessity or the reasonableness of this work in husbandry: and a very small acquaintance with the corruption and obduracy of an un-renewed heart, will supersede any attempts to evince the same in the cultivation of the soul. Only let it be remembered, that nothing but the law, opened in all its spirituality, and applied in its awful sanctions, can ever effect this work. Let us study it more and more, Let us try ourselves by it. Let us bring our actions, words, and thoughts to it as to a touchstone. Let us use it for the rooting out of all false principles, and base affections. Thus shall our seed be sown to more advantage;^o and a glorious harvest await us in the day of the Lord Jesus.^p]

ⁱ Prov. xi. 18.

^k Isaiah lxi. 10.

^l Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

^m Rom. v. 17.

ⁿ Isaiah xlvi. 19.

^o Jer. iv. 3.

^p James iv. 9, 10.

CCCCXLI. OUR RESURRECTION WITH CHRIST A MOTIVE TO HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS.

Col. iii. 1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

ONE of the most distinguished peculiarities of our religion is, that it suggests entirely new motives to action. The inducements which reason could offer, were weak and inefficient: those alone which Christianity proposes. are capable of restraining the passions of men, and of regulating their conduct.

In the words before us we may see

I. The duty of Christians

We are not forbidden to seek earthly things; for, circumstanced as we are, we must use diligence in our respective callings, to obtain food for the body: but we must seek heavenly things

1. In the first place

[We are but too apt to give the preference to earthly things, and to consider religion as a thing of secondary importance. But we are commanded to seek *first* the kingdom of God:^a nor is there any interest whatever, which must not be sacrificed to the welfare of our souls.^b]

2. With the greatest ardour

[It is by no means sufficient to give religious duties the preference, unless we also engage in them with a disposition of mind suited to their importance. We may begin and end the day with prayer, and manifest a strict regard to the sabbath, and yet never find acceptance with God, because our hearts are not right with him. Our affections must be set on things above,^c as those of a worldling are on things below: and in our pursuit of them, we must not only seek, but strive.^d We must take heaven by violence, as it were, if we would ever obtain the enjoyment of it.^e]

To enforce this duty, the apostle suggests, in few but energetic words,

II. Our obligation and encouragement to perform it

1. Our profession of being risen with Christ, obliges us to it

[Christians are risen with their Lord both *fæderally*, and *spiritually*; *fæderally*, in that he is their covenant-head and representative, in and with whom they are circumcised,^f crucified,^g dead,^h buried,ⁱ risen,^k and sitting in heavenly places.^l They are also risen with him *spiritually*, in that they have experienced in their souls a change corresponding with that which Christ underwent in his body: they have crucified their old man,^m are dead to sin,ⁿ are risen to newness of life,^o and have their conversation in heaven.^p

Now for persons professing these things (for the apostle's expression in the text does not imply a doubt, but rather posi-

^a Matt. vi. 33.

^b Luke xiv. 26, 27, 33.

^c Ver. 2.

^d Luke xiii. 24.

^e Matt. xi. 12.

^f Col. ii. 11.

^g Gal. ii. 20.

^h Rom. vi. 8.

ⁱ Col. ii. 12.

^k Col. ii. 12.

^l Eph. ii. 5, 6.

^m Rom. vi. 6.

ⁿ Rom. vi. 9—11.

^o Ib. ver. 4, §.

^p Phil. iii. 23.

tively asserts, that Christianity have experienced these things^q) for them, I say, to be carnally-minded, would be as flagrant an inconsistency, as if a man should call himself an angel of light, while all his works were deeds of darkness: consequently our very profession binds us in the strongest manner to live to God.]

2. The consideration of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God is, moreover, the greatest possible encouragement to fulfil our duty

[“The right hand” of God means the seat of honour and power: and Christ's session there is not mentioned casually, as though it were of no importance to the point in hand: it is specified as an argument of the greatest force; since it is through his appearance there, that we have hope of *pardon for our sins, of strength for our duties, of acceptance for our services.*^r Christ is there as our great advocate, pleading for us the merit of his own blood, obtaining fresh supplies of the Spirit for us, and presenting, together with the incense of his own prevailing intercession, our services to God. What an encouragement then is this to seek the things that are above; since we are assured that we shall not run in vain, or labour in vain! However high we may aspire, we need not fear a disappointment: the more we seek of grace and glory, the higher measures of both we shall obtain.]

We cannot forbear to NOTICE from this subject

1. How few real Christians are there in the world!

[If the character of Christians were, that they sought things *below*, and resembled Christ in his *entombed* state, truly they would be very numerous in every place: since almost all are swallowed up and *buried* in earthly cares or pleasures. But a death unto sin, and a living unto God, alas! how rare are these! Yet most assuredly none who do not exemplify these in their daily conversation, are worthy the name of Christians; nor can they ever enjoy the Christian's portion. We must live to Christ in this world, if we would live with him in the world to come.^s]

2. How blessed are they who are Christians indeed!

[Being risen with Christ, their lives are hid with Christ in God beyond the reach of men or devils.^t While they are engaged in heavenly pursuits, they may enjoy the security which God has ordained for them. Oppositions indeed, and difficulties they must expect; but Christ will not loose one

^q It is the same as if he had said, “Since ye are,” &c.

^r 1 Pet. i. 21.

^s 2 Cor. v. 15.

^t Ver. 3.

member of his mystical body. He derides the vain attempts of his enemies and ours. We too may defy the confederate powers of earth and hell:^u for, however they may obtain a temporary triumph, their efforts shall terminate in their own confusion. With Christ we shall rise victorious; and “when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.”^x]

^u Rom. viii. 33, 34.

^x Ver. 4.

CCCCXLII. THE GOOD OLD WAY.

Jer. vi. 16. Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.

WHATEVER bears the stamp of antiquity upon it, finds, for the most part, a favourable reception in the world, while innovations are admitted with caution and reserve—The gospel itself is often discarded under the idea that it is new—Even as far back as the days of Jeremiah serious religion was deemed a novelty: but the prophet claimed the people’s regard to it, no less from the consideration of its antiquity than of its inherent excellence—

To elucidate the words before us we shall enquire

I. What is that old and good way here spoken of?

The explanation, which our Lord himself has given of this passage,^a shews that we are not to confine its import to holiness alone, but must understand it as comprehending

1. A penitential affiance in God

[Christ declares that he himself is “the way,” the *only* way to the Father^b—To him we must come, trusting in his mediation and intercession, and looking for acceptance through him alone—Now this is certainly the *old* way, marked out by all the Jewish sacrifices, and trodden by Abel and our first

^a Matt. xi. 28, 29.

^b John xiv. 6.

parents—Nor can we doubt of its being the *good way*, since it was appointed of God himself, and has been approved by all his saints from the beginning of the world—]

2. A cheerful obedience to him

[Our Lord expressly says, “Take my yoke upon you;” nor can this ever be dispensed with—Though faith in Christ be the way of acceptance with God, yet obedience to him is the only means of manifesting the sincerity of our faith—Hence holiness is by the prophet called, “The Lord’s highway”—This too is of great antiquity, and must be traced up through prophets and patriarchs to the days of “righteous Abel”—And it must be acknowledged to be *good*, since it tends so much to the perfecting of our nature, and to the adorning of our holy religion—]

This however is not a mere speculative point; as we shall see, if we enquire

II. What is our duty with respect to it

God having so plainly revealed it to us, it becomes us all

1. To enquire after it

[We should not go on in a presumptuous confidence that we are right; but should “stand and see,” and attentively consider whither we are going—We should “ask” of those whom God has appointed to be as way-marks to the people, and whose lips should both keep, and dispense, knowledge—Moreover we should search the sacred oracles (which, as a map, delineate our path with infallible precision) comparing with them the various steps we have taken, and noticing with care the footsteps of Christ and his apostles—Not however trusting in our own researches, we should above all implore the teaching and direction of God’s holy Spirit, who would bring us back from our wanderings, and “guide our feet into the way of peace”—]

2. To walk in it

[To possess knowledge will be of little service unless it produce a practical effect—Having found the right way we must come into it, renouncing every other path, how pleasant or profitable soever it may have been—Nor must we only get into it, but “walk therein” continually, neither diverted from it by allurements, nor discouraged in it by any difficulties—Whatever advances we may have made, we are still to prosecute the same path, trusting in Christ as our advocate with

God, and rendering to him an uniform and unreserved obedience—]

Nor will this appear hard to us, if we consider

III. The encouragement given us to perform this duty

To those who are out of this way, whatever they may boast, we are sure there is no solid peace: but they who walk in it shall find rest

1. In their way

[Sweet is the rest which a weary and heavy-laden sinner finds in Jesus Christ: he sees in *his* blood a sufficiency of virtue to expiate all his guilt, and to cleanse him from all his sin: he perceives that the foundation of his hope is sure and immovable; and therefore, “having peace in his conscience, he rejoices in hope of the glory of God”—In the way of holy obedience he enjoys, moreover, a present and a great reward: for while he rests from turbulent passions and tormenting fears, he finds, that “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever”—]

2. In their end

[If the ungodly have no peace in this world, much less have they in the world to come: but the obedient believer will enjoy perfect rest, when he shall have ceased from his present labours—“There is a rest remaining for the people of God;” and such a rest as neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived: at the instant of their dismission from the body they shall be borne on the wings of angels into the regions of the blest, and lie in the bosom of their Lord to all eternity—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who disregard religion

[You indeed may plead long prescription (even from the days of Cain) and general practice too, in favour of your habits: but do you doubt which is the *better way*? Do you not in your hearts envy those who walk in *the good old way*; and wish that you were able to live as they live?—If then you would not persist in following a track, which you knew would lead to a place extremely distant from that which you were desirous to reach, attend to the warning now given, and turn unto God in the way marked out for you in his gospel—]

2. To those who seek indeed the paths of religion, but find no rest in them

[There are many who approve of coming to Christ for salvation, but wish to be excused from taking his yoke upon

them; while others, on the contrary, would be content to render obedience to his law, if they might be at liberty to decline the humiliating method which he has prescribed for their acceptance with God—Others, again, profess to approve of the good old way; but cannot renounce the cares and pleasures of the world which retard their progress in it—No wonder then if such persons find no solid rest: indeed, it is well for them that they do not; since it would only deceive them to their eternal ruin—if we would have rest, either here or hereafter, it must be obtained in the way that has been pointed out; nor can it be obtained in any other to all eternity^d]—]

3. To those who are walking comfortably in the good way

[Be not contented to go to heaven alone; but labour in your respective spheres to bring others along with you—This was the disposition of the church of old;^e and should be the desire of all who have an hope towards God—It is scarcely to be conceived how much the exertions of Christians in their several families would extend the benefits of ministerial labours—The public ministration of the word would be far better attended, and incomparably more improved—Since then all are commanded to seek instruction, let all endeavour to communicate it*—So will the good way be more frequented; and more abundant blessings flow down on all who walk in it—]

^d John iii. 36. Heb. xii. 14.

^e Song i. 4.

* If this were the subject of a Sermon for *Charity Schools*, the propriety of subscribing liberally for the support of such institutions might be stated *here*.

CCCCXLIII. GOD'S ASSISTANCE A MOTIVE TO DILIGENCE.

Phil. ii. 12, 13. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

THERE is no person, however eminent his attainments in religion may be, who does not need to be exhorted and urged to press forward—The Philippians, in the judgment of the apostle, had had “the good work begun in them;” yea, they had “obeyed the word while

he was with them," and had made a still greater proficiency since his departure from them: yet he animates them to further exertions, and enforces his exhortation with the strongest arguments—Thus should all Christian ministers "put their people in remembrance of these things, notwithstanding they may already know them, or even be established in the truth"—Let us then receive the apostle's words as addressed to ourselves in particular, while we consider

I. The exhortation

God commands us to "work out our salvation"

[We are not to imagine that salvation is either the reward of our *merits*, or the effect of our unassisted *exertions*; for if, as our Lord assures us, "without him we can do nothing," it is evident that we are far enough from being able to keep the whole law of God; which yet we must do, if we are to receive heaven on the ground of our own righteousness—Nevertheless we have a work to do, a work of infinite importance, in performing which we are not mere machines, but voluntary agents: and on our performing of that work our salvation depends^a—We must consider our ways, repent of sin, believe the gospel, and devote ourselves to God; not indeed as conceiving ourselves sufficient for these things, but in dependence on that aid, which God will afford to all who seek him in sincerity and truth—]

But we must engage in this work "with fear and trembling"

[The terms "fear and trembling" do not import a slavish dread and terror, but an holy vigilance and circumspection^b—And there is great need of this in working out our salvation—Let us only consider how many lusts we have to mortify, and how many duties to perform; how many temptations we have to withstand, and adversaries to overcome; how prone we are to err, and how many devices Satan uses in order to deceive us; how insufficient we are of ourselves for this great work, and how awful would be the consequences of miscarrying in it; and we shall readily acknowledge that our utmost caution is little enough—St. Paul felt the force of these considerations; and notwithstanding he knew himself to be a chosen vessel

^a See Acts xxvii. 25, 31.

^b This is the meaning of it in every place where it occurs:—see 1 Cor. ii. 3. 2 Cor. vii. 15. and Eph. vi. 5. That it cannot mean slavish fear is evident from Rom. viii. 15. and vii. 6.

unto God, he kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^e]—

That we may all be led to comply with this advice, let us consider

II. The argument with which it is enforced

To see the full force of this argument we must view it

1. As a call on our gratitude

[Having commended the Philippians for their obedience to God, he reminds them, whence it was that they were made to differ from others. They were by nature as destitute of any ability or inclination to serve God as any other people upon earth: but God, of his own good pleasure, and without respect to any thing in them, had given them both to will and to do what was acceptable in his sight—Now this sovereign act of grace laid them under a tenfold obligation to love and serve him: they must be vile indeed, if such love did not constrain them to obedience—Have any of us then been converted by the grace of God, and been “made willing in the day of his power?” Let us consider this mercy as the strongest of all motives for yielding up ourselves as living sacrifices, holy, and acceptable to him as our reasonable service^d—Are we “a chosen generation, that had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy?” let us exert ourselves to the utmost to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light”^e]—

2. As an antidote to our fears

[It is difficult to feel the importance of eternal things, and not give way to secret fears and misgivings, respecting the final success of our present exertions. And indeed, if we were required to work out our salvation by our own strength, we might well yield, not only to fear, but to utter despondency—But the argument urged by the apostle removes our apprehensions by assuring us, that he, who has given us the will, will also give us the power, to obey him^f—It is not to mock us that God has created in us a disposition to what is good: it is not to abandon us at last that he has hitherto given “grace sufficient for us;” his past favours are an earnest and pledge of others yet to come: he will continue to “strengthen us in our inward man,” and will “perfect his own strength in our weakness”^g—Let us then acknowledge the force of the argument in this view; and, assured that “our strength shall be according to

^e 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^d Rom. xii. 1. ^e 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

^f The text, with Is. xli. 10.

^g Phil. iv. 13. with 2 Cor. xii. 9.

our day," let us "be stedfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, *forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*"^h]—]

3. As an incentive to vigilance

[Since it is "God who gives us both to will and to do, and *that* entirely of his own good pleasure," we must of necessity be altogether dependent on him; if he keep us, we shall stand: if he leave us, we shall fall—Now God is a jealous God; and will surely manifest his displeasure if we walk unwatchfully before him—We may easily "grieve his Spirit,"ⁱ yea, if we continue in wilful habits of neglect, or in any allowed sin, we may "quench his Spirit,"^k for he has warned us that "his Spirit shall not alway strive with man,"^l and that "if we rebel, and vex his holy Spirit, he will turn, and become our enemy"^m—The Israelites, who, notwithstanding they were brought out of Egypt, and fed with manna from heaven, perished in the wilderness, are set forth as examples to usⁿ—And to many under temporal or spiritual afflictions may that pungent question be addressed, "Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord, when he led thee by the way?"^o—Well may this consideration stir us up to watchfulness and circumspection, lest by intermitting our labours, and relaxing our exertions in the work of our salvation, we bring upon ourselves his heavy displeasure^p]—]

From hence we may SEE

1. The beauty and harmony of scripture doctrines

[Our entire dependence on divine grace, together with the absolute sovereignty of God in the distribution of his favours, are here clearly stated—Yet the necessity of our working out our own salvation is as strongly declared, as if every thing depended on our own efforts—Now these are often set in opposition to each other, as though they were contrary and inconsistent doctrines—But God sees no inconsistency in them; nor shall we, if we only once learn to receive the scriptures with the simplicity of little children, instead of presuming to be wise above what is written—On the contrary, the two doctrines are perfectly harmonious; nor is there any stronger argument for exertions on our part, than the freeness and sufficiency of God's grace—Let us not then set altar against altar, and doctrine against doctrine, but join in our experience those things which God has indissolubly united, and which are equally essential to our eternal welfare—]

^h 1 Cor. xv. 58.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 30.

^k 1 Thess. v. 19.

^l Gen. vi. 3.

^m Isaiah lxiii. 10. Exod. xxiii. 21.

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 11.

^o Jer. ii. 17.

^p 2 Chron. xv. 9.

2. The folly of the excuses which men urge in justification of their own supineness

[One says, It is in vain for me to attempt working, unless God work in me both to will and to do what he commands—But will any man forbear to plough and sow his ground, because he cannot insure an harvest?—We are to work out our salvation to the utmost of our power, and to call upon God for all necessary assistance: it is in activity, and not in sloth, that we are to expect his aid; “ Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ will give thee light:” and if we will not put forth the little strength we have, we must reap to all eternity the bitter fruits of our own supineness—

Another says, I need not concern myself much about the present state of my soul; for if God has ordained me to life, I shall live; and if he has begun the good work in me, he will carry it on—But to what purpose has God enjoined fear and trembling, if we are at liberty to indulge such a presumptuous confidence as this?—It is true, that “ God will keep the feet of his saints;” but it is by fear and trembling that he will keep them; his injunctions are, “ Be not high-minded, but fear.”^a And, “ Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”—

Let not then the doctrines of grace be so perverted and abused: but let us exert ourselves, as if we could do all; and depend on God, as knowing that, without him, we can do nothing—]

3. The firmness of the believer's hopes

[While the believer is maintaining continual watchfulness and care, he still enjoys peace in his soul, and oftentimes “ a full assurance of hope”—But on what is his hope founded? Is it on his own resolution, zeal, and stedfastness? Nothing is further from his mind: he relies on the sovereignty, the power, and the faithfulness of his God—God's grace is his own, and he disposes of it according to his own good pleasure; therefore the believer, while he feels himself the most unworthy of the human race, hopes that “ God will shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace in acts of kindness towards *him*”—“ God is able to keep him from falling; and therefore the believer says, “ I know in whom I have believed, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him”—And lastly, God has confirmed his promise with an oath; and therefore they who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus, have strong consolation; because it is impossible for God to lie; and he is faithful who hath promised^b—Thus we see that the weakest Christian stands on a rock, which defies all the storms and

^a Rom. xi. 20.

^b 2 Tim. i. 12.

^c 1 Cor. x. 12.

^d Heb. vi. 17, 18.

tempests that ever can assail it—"Let us then be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and look to him to "fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his will," and to "preserve us blameless unto his heavenly kingdom"—]

CCCCXLIV. AGAINST CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD:

Rom. xii. 2. *Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*

THE morality, no less than the doctrines, of the gospel far excels the boasted inventions of philosophy—There is not one principle in the human heart, or one action of our lives, which is not depraved by sin—The whole system of man's conduct is deranged; and to rectify it in all its parts, is the scope of that revelation which God has given us—The inspired writers are not satisfied with lopping off a few branches; they strike at the root of all sin; and labour to bring us back to that state of allegiance to our Maker from which we are fallen—This is peculiarly observable in the exhortation before us, in explaining which we shall shew

I. What is that conformity to the world which we are to avoid

Doubtless there is a degree of conformity to the world which is necessary, if we would not render ourselves perfectly ridiculous and absurd: but there are limits, beyond which we ought not to go—To mark out those limits we may observe, that we should not be conformed to

1. Its company and conduct

[We cannot *wholly* avoid worldly company; for "then we must needs go out of the world:" but we surely should not choose such for our companions; and much less form an indissoluble alliance with them^a—If we ourselves be spiritual, it is not possible that we should enjoy the society of a carnal person, because his views, desires, and pursuits must of necessity be as opposite to ours as darkness is to light^b—By forming a

^a 1 Cor. vii. 39. "only in the Lord." ^b 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

connexion with such persons; what can be expected but that we should be enticed to imitate their conduct?—And though we commit no flagrant evil, we are assured, that while we are walking according to the course of this world, we walk after the will of Satan and not of God^c]

2. Its maxims and principles

[According to the established maxims of the world, we should seek above all things the favour and esteem of men; we should avoid every thing that may make us appear singular; and on no account testify our disapprobation of any practice that is sanctioned by general custom—But how do such principles accord with the holy scriptures? In them we are told that, if we make it our grand aim to please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ:^d and, if we have attained that object, instead of congratulating ourselves upon our success, we have reason to tremble on account of the woe denounced against us^e—Instead of dreading a necessary singularity, we are required to shine as lights in a dark world,^f and not only to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but faithfully to reprove them^g—We are to be armed with a steady determination to live the rest of our time, not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God^h]

3. Its spirit and temper

[The spirit of the world altogether consists in self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-confidence, and self-complacency; nor can any thing be more abhorrent from a Christian state than such a disposition as this—We are not to be resting satisfied with present attainments, or studying how much we can please the flesh without forfeiting the favour of God; but are rather to be pressing forward towards perfection without at all regarding the loss or pain we may be called to undergo in the prosecution of our duty—How hateful a want of such an holy resolution is, may be seen in the reply which our Lord made to Peter, who would have dissuaded him from exposing himself to the trials he had predicted; “Get thee behind me Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”^k]

Further light will be reflected on this subject by considering

II. Wherein consists that transformation of soul that is opposed to it

^c Eph. ii. 2.

^d Gal. i. 10.

^e Luke vi. 26.

^f Phil. ii. 15.

^g Eph. v. 11.

^h 1 Pet. iv. 2.

ⁱ Acts xx. 24. & xxi. 18.

^k Matt. xvi. 23

The Christian is “a new creature; old things are passed away; and all things are become new;” according to the proficiency he has made, he conforms himself to

1. Other principles

[The worldly man knows no higher principle than self-love: whatever be his subordinate motives of action, all may be traced up to this—But they who are partakers of the gospel salvation, are under the influence of a far nobler principle, the love of Christ: the thought of Christ having died for them, fills their hearts with admiration and gratitude: it inspires them with an ardent desire to testify their sense of his kindness; and forms a powerful incentive to holy actions—This is attested by St. Paul;¹ and it constitutes a most essential part of that transformation of soul, which characterizes the true Christian—Subordinate motives indeed a believer may feel: but a desire of pleasing and honouring God, and a fear of dishonouring or displeasing him, will operate with the greatest force; and *that* too, in opposition to carnal considerations, no less than in aid of them—]

2. Other rules

[The fashion of the world is the standard by which men in general regulate their conduct—But the Christian takes the word of God for his guide, and the example of Christ for his pattern; and, instead of reducing the rule to his practice, he endeavours to elevate his practice to the rule—He brings every thing “to the law and to the testimony;” and a plain declaration, or command, of God will be more to him than any precepts of men, or than the example of the whole universe—It is his ambition to “walk as Christ walked;” and though he knows that he can never attain *the measure* of his perfection, yet he strives incessantly to follow *the pattern* of it, that so he may be perfect even as his Father that is in heaven is perfect^m]—

3. Other ends

[A Christian would not be content with ordering his actions aright, even if he could arrive at the highest degrees of holiness, unless he had also the testimony of his conscience that he sought, not his own glory, but the glory of God: having been “bought with a price,” he is conscious that he is “not his own,” and that consequently he “ought not to live unto himself, but unto him that died for him”—He feels that, if in any thing he consult merely his own honour or interest, he so far withdraws from God the honour due unto his name; and

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^m Matt. v. 48.

therefore he labours to comply with that divine injunction, “Whether ye eat or drink or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God”ⁿ]—]

Thus is the Christian transformed, not in respect of his life only, but in the spirit of his mind; and therefore can declare from experience

III. What effects this progressive renovation will produce

There are many objections raised by the world against the sanctity that has been before described; and there is much opposition to it in the heart of every unrenewed person: but the experience of it will most effectually discover it to be

1. Good in itself

[Piety is too generally considered as needless preciseness: nor need we have any thing more than a disconformity to the world, and a transformation of soul after the divine image, in order to become objects of reproach and abhorrence—Even the more sober and discreet part of mankind regard the precepts before us as “hard sayings,” unsuitable to modern times, and unfit for general practice—But as our Lord said of his doctrines, that whosoever would do his will, should know whether they were of God,^o so we may say of his precepts—While we are blinded by carnal desires, the commands of God will appear rigorous; and we shall labour more to explain them away, than to obey them: but if once we adopt them as the rule of our conduct, their beauty and excellence will manifestly appear; and we shall be convinced that, to obey them, is, to be truly happy^p]—]

2. Acceptable to God

[While religion is accounted superstition, it is no wonder that the sublimer duties of Christianity are declined as unnecessary, and that they who practise them are deemed “righteous over-much”—But a renovation of soul will soon dispel this error, and shew us that, the more entire our devotedness to God be, the more highly shall we be raised in God’s esteem—If only we make the word of God the standard of our actions, we cannot possibly be too earnest in improving the talents committed to us: nor can we doubt but that the tokens of God’s approbation that we shall receive, shall be proportioned to the sacrifices we have made, and the exertions we have used in his service^q]—]

ⁿ 1 Cor. x. 31.

^p Isaiah xxxiii. 17.

^o John vii. 17.

^q Matt. xxv. 20—23.

3. Beneficial to man

[It is usually supposed that a compliance with the directions in the text would weaken our faculties, and so distract our minds as to render us unfit for the common offices of life—But the very reverse of this is known to be true by all those who make the experiment—Heavenly-mindedness tends to “perfect” the man of God in all his faculties, and “thoroughly to furnish him unto all good works”—Till this takes possession of the soul, a man is the sport of every temptation, and liable to be led captive by every lust: but grace will establish his heart; it will bring a consistency into his whole conduct; it will change him into the very image of God; and will render him “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are yet conformed to the world

[If you are free from gross vices, you do not apprehend your conformity to the world to be any reason for questioning the safety of your state—But it is scarcely possible for God to declare in more express terms your guilt and danger, than he has done in various parts of holy writ—You are therefore reduced to this alternative, either to come out of Sodom or to perish in it; either to enter in at the strait gate and walk in the narrow way, or to fall into that destruction that awaits you at the end of the broad and frequented path—O that God may enable you to choose the good part; and to adhere to it in spite of all the odium your singularity may bring upon you!—]

3. Those who profess to have experienced a transformation of soul

[You need to be much upon your guard lest “after you have escaped the pollutions of the world, you should be again entangled therein and overcome”^s—It is your wisdom to avoid temptation, and to guard against the snares that are laid for your feet—However circumspectly you may walk, you will find reason enough to lament your manifold defects—Lay not then any stumbling-blocks in your own way; but seek rather to experience the transforming efficacy of the gospel: let the world be crucified unto you, and be ye crucified unto the world^t—As obedient children, “fashion yourselves in no respect according to your former lusts in your ignorance, but as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation”^u]—

^r John xvii. 16. Gal. i. 4. ² John ii. 15, 16. Jam. iv. 4.

^s 2 Pet. ii. 20. ^t Gal. vi. 14. ^u 1 Pet. i. 14, 15.

CCCCXLV. THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH AS MARRIED TO CHRIST.

Ps. xlv. 10, 11. *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*

EVERY change of situation brings with it many correspondent duties—

That of marriage in particular requires a sacrifice of other attachments—

It binds each party to renounce whatever habits or practices may be found inconsistent with their mutual happiness—

Such sacrifices are more eminently necessary for those united to Christ^a—

To this effect God addresses the church in the words of our text—

We may consider

I. The direction given to the church

The church is, by adoption, by regeneration, and especially by her union with the Lord Jesus Christ, become the “daughter” of God^b—

She is here addressed by him under that affectionate appellation—

Nor is it possible for a father to give more salutary advice—

Or to deliver it in more persuasive terms; “Hearken, consider, incline,” &c.

The direction itself is of a very peculiar nature

[The Jews were permitted to marry the heathen virgins whom they had taken in war—

But they were to allow them the space of a month to forget their own relations^c—

Thus the captives, weaned from former habits, might become loving companions, and obedient wives—

^a The psalm before us is a kind of nuptial hymn; the former part of which recites the excellencies and glories of the heavenly Bridegroom, and the latter celebrates the praises of the church, which is his bride.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^c Deut. xxi. 10—13.

In reference to this law, the church is exhorted to forget her friends—

She has been taken captive by Christ, who makes her the first overtures of marriage—

But his union with her is incompatible with carnal attachments—

She can never love and obey him as she ought, till her heart be weaned from all other lovers—]

It is given to every individual in the church of God

[Every wife is to forsake her parents, and cleave to her husband^d—

Much more is it needful for the soul to forsake all for Christ—

To him we are espoused by our own voluntary surrender^e—

Nor will he be satisfied with a divided heart^f—

Ungodliness and worldly lusts must be entirely renounced^g—

The companions of our unregenerate state must be forsaken^h—

Our very parents, yea, even life itself, must be hated, when they stand in competition with himⁱ—

The change in our actions and affections must be entire^k—

And we must subscribe from our hearts the terms proposed to us^l]—

This injunction will not appear harsh, if we attend to

II. The arguments with which it is enforced

God deals with us in all things as intelligent beings—

And labours to persuade us by rational considerations

1. It is our highest interest

[Though the church is vile in herself, she is complete in Christ^m—

He has given orders for her thorough purificationⁿ—

When she is presented to him, she is cleansed from all the filthiness of her former state^o—

Hence she is exceeding beautiful in his eyes^p—

And he feels a longing desire after communion with her^q—

No bridegroom ever so much rejoiced over his bride, as he over her^r—

More especially is he delighted with her when he sees that her heart is whole with him^s—

^d Gen. ii. 24.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^f Hos. x. 2.

^g Tit. ii. 11, 12. and 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

^h 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 26.

^k 2 Cor. v. 17.

^l Hos. iii. 3.

^m Col. ii. 10.

^u Esther ii. 3.

^o Eph. v. 25—27.

^p Song iv. 9—11.

^q Song ii. 14.

^r Isaiah lxiii. 5.

^s Prov. xi. 20.

How powerful an argument is this with an ingenuous soul!—

What can influence a wife more than to know that her conduct will conciliate the esteem of her husband?—

And what can delight a regenerate soul so much, as to please Christ?—

Let this hope then animate us to renounce all for him—

And to address him in the words of holy David^t]—

2. It is our indispensable duty

[The husband is to be considered as a Lord over his wife^u—

To him she owes an humble obediential reverence^x—

Christ also is the supreme head and Lord of his Church—

No limits whatever are to be set to his authority—

We must “worship” and serve him equally with God the Fathery—

Let us then at least shew him that regard, which we ourselves expect from a fellow-creature—

A husband will not endure a rival in his wife’s affections—

Shall we then “provoke the Lord himself to jealousy” by carnal attachments?—

Let us not dare in such a way to violate our nuptial engagements—

When any thing solicits a place in our hearts, let us utterly reject it—

And let us exercise that fidelity towards him, which we have ever experienced at his hands—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are endeavouring to unite the love of the world with the love of Christ

[The interests of the world, and of Christ, are altogether opposite—

Our Lord declares them to be absolutely irreconcileable^z—

St. James also represents even a wish to reconcile them, as an incontestible proof of enmity against God^a—

As Jesus deserves, so he demands our whole hearts^b—

Let us not then “mock him, and deceive ourselves”—

If the Lord be God, let us not serve Baal, but him^c—

And let us unite in imitating the repentant Jews^d]—

2. Those who are desirous of uniting themselves to Christ

^t Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^u 1 Pet. iii. 6.

^x Eph. v. 33.

^y John v. 23.

^z Matt. vi. 24.

^a Jam. iv. 4.

^b Prov. xxiii. 26.

^c 1 Kings xviii. 21.

^d 2 Chron. xv. 12.

[It is a great honour indeed which ye aspire after—
 Yet is it offered to the vilest of the human race^e—
 But you must get a change of raiment, that you may not
 dishonour your new station^f—
 Labour then to “purge out all remains of the old leaven”—
 Be on your guard, lest, after having escaped the pollutions
 of the world, you be again entangled with them and over-
 come^g—
 “Remember Lot’s wife” that you may shun her example—
 So shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship with Jesus—
 And live in the fruition of him to all eternity*—]

^e Ezek. xvi. 3, 4, 5, 8. ^f Zech. iii. 3—5. Rev. xix. 7, 8. ^g 2 Pet. ii. 20.

* This subject, and all others of a similar nature, must be treated with extreme care and delicacy.

CCCCXLVI. THE DUTIES OF MODERATION AND WATCHFULNESS.

1 Thess. v. 8. *Let us who are of the day be sober; putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*

THE exact season of the day of judgment is wisely hid from our eyes. If it were revealed to us, there is no reason to think that we should make a right improvement of that knowledge. The uncertainty of its arrival is far better calculated to excite our diligence in religious duties, because, while we are told that it will come as surely, as irresistibly, and as unexpectedly too, as a thief in the night, or as travail upon a woman with child, we see the necessity of continual watchfulness and preparation for it. The world at large indeed will rest in supineness and security, in spite of every warning that is given them: but they who profess to fear God should manifest a different spirit; and, as persons apprised of their danger, should ever stand upon their guard. To this effect the apostle exhorts us in the text; in discoursing on which we shall consider

I. The description given of believers

The careless world are in a state of intellectual and moral darkness

[The light of divine truth has not shined into their hearts, nor have the clouds of nature's darkness been dispelled. "They call evil good, and good evil; and put darkness for light, and light for darkness."^a Their lives too abound with deeds of darkness; "nor will they come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved."]

As contrasted with them, believers "are of the day"

[They have been "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light" of the gospel, and are enabled to "discern between good and evil." Their dispositions also are changed, so that they desire to "walk in the light even as God is in the light;" and they "come to the light, that their deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." They see indeed much in themselves for which they have reason to be ashamed: but they would gladly attain to such purity of heart, that their inmost thoughts and principles, no less than their actions, should bear the minutest inspection of all their fellow-creatures.]

But that they are prone to relapse into their former state, is strongly intimated in

II. The exhortation addressed to them

The children of darkness are represented in the preceding context as addicted to sloth and intemperance;^b in opposition to which vices, believers are exhorted to "be sober," that is, to exercise

1. Moderation

[They who know not the vanity of earthly things, may reasonably be expected to run to excess in their attachment to them, and their anxiety about them. But it ill becomes those, who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, to set their hearts upon such empty, unsatisfying, transient enjoyments. God would have them to "be without carefulness," like "the birds of the air, that neither sow nor gather into barns." He expects them to "set their affections rather on things above," and to put forth the energy of their minds in the pursuit of objects worthy the attention of an immortal spirit. And though they may both rejoice and weep on account of present occurrences, yet they should "rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and weep as though they wept not, because the fashion of this world passeth away."^c]

2. Vigilance

[Others yield to sloth, because they see no occasion for activity: but believers know what numerous and mighty ene-

^a Isai. v. 20.

^b Ver. 7.

^c 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

mies they have to contend with: they see too, how short and uncertain their time is for accomplishing the work which God has given them to do; and of what infinite importance it is that, whenever called to appear before God, they should be able to give a good account of their stewardship: surely then *they* can find no time to loiter. They should rather exert themselves with all diligence; and, “whatsoever their hand findeth to do, they should do it with all their might.”]

This exhortation is at once illustrated and enforced by
III. The particular direction that accompanies it

Believers, whatever they may have attained, are yet in a state of warfare

[Their enemies, though often vanquished, are still ready to return to the charge: nor will they fail to take advantage of any unwatchfulness on our part: they know the places where we are most open to assault; nor have we any security against them but by guarding every pass, and standing continually on our watch-tower. Without such precautions the strongest would be overcome, and the most victorious be reduced to a miserable captivity.]

There is, however, armour, whereby they may become invincible

[Faith, hope, and love are the principal graces of the Christian; and, while he keeps them in exercise, they are as armour to his soul. Faith sees the things that are invisible, as though they were present to the bodily eyes: love fixes our hearts upon them: and hope both appropriates them to ourselves, and enables us to anticipate the enjoyment of them. Having these for our helmet and our breastplate, our head and heart are secured. In vain does Satan suggest, that there is nothing beyond this present world, or nothing better than what he offers us, or that, if there be, we, at least, have no part in it. These fiery darts are instantly repelled; and we determine to continue our conflicts with him, till he is bruised under our feet.]

This armour therefore every believer must put on

[In vain shall we hope to maintain our moderation and watchfulness, if we be not clothed with this divine panoply. Every day must we put it on afresh; or rather we must rest on our arms day and night. Nor must we use it only in the hour of conflict; we must, like good soldiers, habituate ourselves to the use of it, even when we are not sensible of immediate danger, in order that, when called to defend ourselves, we may be expert and successful in the contest. We must be careful too that we never separate these pieces of armour; for, whether our head or heart were unprotected, our vigilant enemy would

assuredly seize his opportunity to inflict a deadly wound. It is on the union of our graces that our safety depends. Whether we lay aside our faith, our love, or our hope, we are equally in danger. Let us then put them on daily, and preserve them in continual exercise, that we may fight a good fight, and be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."]

This subject being altogether addressed to those who "are of the day," we need only add a few words to those who "are of the night"

[The warning given them in the context is well worthy of their deep attention. It is said, that "the day of the Lord shall overtake them as a thief in the night." They lie down in security, concluding that, because the ruffian has not hitherto disturbed their midnight slumbers, he never will: but at last he comes upon them to their terror, and spoils them to their confusion. Thus will the day of judgment, or, which is the same to them, the day of death, come upon the ungodly; and they will lose their souls, which it should have been their daily labour to secure. Even believers need to be exhorted to sobriety, and must be vanquished, if they follow not the directions given them: what then must the unbeliever do, if he continue in his supineness? What hope can there be for *him*? Let all arise from their slumbers, and arm themselves for the battle. "It is high time for all of us to awake out of sleep: let us therefore put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light;" and let us war a good warfare till "death itself is swallowed up in victory."]

CCCCXLVII. DIRECTIONS HOW TO SEEK HEAVEN WITH SUCCESS.

1 Pet. i. 13. *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

THE truths of God deserve our attention on account of their own excellence—

But they are principally to be valued for the effects they produce on our lives—

The apostles never rest satisfied with stating a mere system of doctrines—

They invariably proceed to make a practical application of them to the soul—

St. Peter had briefly opened the blessed state of true believers—

He had represented them as begotten to a glorious inheritance, of which their joy in Christ was an earnest, and to which through their present trials, they would be advanced—

He then urged the near approach of that glory, as a reason for exerting themselves more diligently in their Christian calling—“*Wherefore,*” &c.

The words of the text lead us to consider

I. The great object of a Christian’s pursuit

There are in scripture many beautiful descriptions of heaven—

But none more interesting than that contained in the words before us—

The day of judgment is here called “the revelation of Jesus Christ”

[Jesus Christ was revealed in the first promise that was made to man^a—

He was also exhibited in the sacrifices which Abel offered^b—

In successive ages he was made known in clearer prophecies^c—

And typified by various ordinances of the Jewish ritual^d—

In process of time he was personally “manifested in human flesh”—

And shewed himself to be the Son of God by most irrefragable proofs^e—

In the preaching of his gospel he was yet more fully revealed—

The glory of God as shining in his face is most transcendently displayed^f—

Still however “we see him as yet only through a glass darkly”^g—

But in the last day he will appear in all his majesty and glory^h—

He will “be revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire”ⁱ—

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^b Heb. xi. 4. and xii. 24.

^c Gen. xxii. 18. & Isa. liii. 4,5,11. ^d Comp. Exod. xii. 5. with 1 Pet.

^e Acts ii. 22. Rom. i. 4.

[i. 19.]

^f 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^h Matt. xxv. 31.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

His enemies, no less than his friends, will then see him to be "King of kings, and Lord of lords"—]

In that day "grace will be brought unto us"

[Grace and glory are sometimes used as synonymous terms in scripture^k—

Indeed, grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated—

The spiritual blessings which God bestows, appear now to be the gifts of grace^l—

But how much more shall we acknowledge the glories of heaven to be so!—

How shall we marvel at the goodness of God in all his dealings towards us!—

How shall we adore his wisdom, even in the darkest of his dispensations—

How shall we stand amazed that *we* were saved, while so many others were lost!—

Surely, "when the top-stone is brought forth, we shall cry, Grace, grace, unto it"^m—

All this felicity "shall be brought unto us" openly, and in rich abundance—

Now, the grace imparted to us is small, though "sufficient for us" —

And the consolations vouchsafed unto us, are known only to ourselves—

But *in that day* the kingdom will be given us in the presence of the whole universeⁿ—

And our happiness shall be commensurate with our capacities and desires—

What we partake of *now*, we obtain by diligent pursuit—

What we receive *then*, shall be "brought unto us" freely by the hand of Jesus himself—]

In the mean time it becomes us to seek it with all earnestness

II. In what manner we ought to seek it

The directions given by the apostle are very suitable and instructive—

He recommends to us three things

1. Activity of mind

[The Jews were accustomed to wear long garments—

These they girded about their loins, when it was needful to use expedition^o—

^k 2 Cor. iii. 18. compared with the text.

^m Zech. iv. 7.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 32, 34.

^l Eph. ii. 7, 8.

^o Luke xii. 35—37.

By this figure, familiar to them, the apostle represents our duty—

Our minds are dissipated by ten thousand vanities—

And our affections, for the most part, flow loosely round us—

But our thoughts and desires should be carefully gathered in—

We should pray, like David, “*Unite my heart to fear thy name*”^p—

Heaven is not to be sought with a divided heart—

Earthly affections would impede our progress, as flowing garments in a race—

The prophet compares them to an incumbrance of thick clay upon the feet^q—

We should therefore “gird up the loins of our mind”—

And “*give all diligence to make our calling and election sure*”—]

2. Sobriety of manners

[Sobriety, in the scripture use of the term, means moderation—

Excessive cares, and inordinate attachments, are very unfavourable to the soul—

They so engross the mind with *present* things, as to draw it away from those which are *eternal*—

We cannot therefore too carefully watch against these evils—

We should endeavour to be “dying daily” to the world—

We should be as one crucified, to it; and it, as one crucified, to us^r—

This is the state and character of every true Christian^s—

And we must attain it, if we would successfully pursue the one thing needful—]

3. Stedfastness of faith

[Faith respects the certainty of the promises; and hope, the accomplishment—

Now, our faith is apt to waver, and our hope, to languish—

Temptations often allure us to forego our interest in heavenly things—

And unbelief would often persuade us that we have no part or lot in them—

But we must be careful never to be moved away from the hope of the gospel^t—

^p Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

^q Hab. ii. 6.

^r Gal. vi. 14.

^s Gal. v. 24.

^t Col. i. 23.

Hope is the very anchor of the soul that must keep us steadfast in this tempestuous world^u—

We must “therefore hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm *to the end*”^x—

The nearer we come to the prize, the more earnest should be our expectation of it—

If our conflicts be many, we should, even against hope, believe in hope^y—

The proper disposition of our souls is well described by the apostles^z—

And it is to persons of this description only, that Christ’s appearance will be a source of joy^a]—

ADDRESS

1. Those who are only nominal Christians

[Your loins indeed are girt, but it is for the pursuit of earthly objects—

Instead of having your souls engrossed with heavenly things, you are perfectly indifferent towards them—

As for your hopes, they extend to nothing but what relates to this present life—

Alas! what an awful contrast is there between you and the true Christian!—

What then, suppose ye, shall be brought to *you* at the revelation of Jesus Christ?—

The apostle, in a fore-cited passage, tells you, it will be “vengeance”^b—

Yes, and Jesus will bring it with his own hand—

It is in vain to think that your portion will be the same with that of a diligent, self-denying Christian—

But, blessed be God, grace is now brought to you by the gospel—

Yea, all the glory of heaven is now offered you by God himself—

Only repent, and go unto God as reconciled in Christ Jesus—

Then shall you “pass from death to life,” and from hell to heaven—]

2. Those who are Christians indeed

[There are some, who “shine as lights in a dark world”—

Some, who, while living on earth, “have their conversation in heaven”—

Doubtless, ye meet with many conflicts and troubles in your way—

^u Heb. vi. 19.

^x Heb. iii. 6.

^y Rom. iv. 18.

^z 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^a Heb. ix. 28.

^b 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^c Acts ii. 38, 39.

To you then in particular is the text addressed—
For persons, circumstanced like you, these words were written^d—

Survey that grace which is now speedily to be brought unto you—

Take a view of all the glory and felicity of the heavenly world—

Compare with that your light and momentary afflictions—

You will then soon form the same estimate as St. Paul before you did^e—

Be not then diverted from the great object of your pursuit—

Remember the solemn caution which God himself has given you^f—

And take for your encouragement that faithful promise^g—

^d 1 Pet. i. 1, 6.

^e Rom. viii. 18.

^f Heb. x. 38.

^g Matt. xxiv. 13.

CCCCXLVIII. DIRECTIONS FOR RUNNING OUR RACE.

1 Cor. ix. 24. *So run that ye may obtain.*

THERE is not any thing around us from which we may not draw some hints for our spiritual instruction. The habits and customs of the world, if duly improved, will afford us many valuable lessons. A reference to these is peculiarly useful when we wish to convey instruction to others; because it strikes the imagination more forcibly, and carries stronger conviction to the judgment. St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, availed himself of the Isthmian games which were celebrated there, to illustrate their duty with respect to their souls. Amongst other sports, that of the foot-race was held in high estimation; and great preparations were made by those who engaged in them, in order to qualify them for their extraordinary exertions. In reference to these the apostle speaks of himself as running in this race; and proposes himself to the Corinthians as a pattern for their imitation, if they were desirous to win the prize.

We shall consider

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The direction here given

The words of the text are not a mere exhortation to run our race, but a special direction respecting the manner in which we are to run it.^a We should be, like the apostle,

1. Disentangled from worldly cares

[St. Paul had equal liberty with others to marry, and to take a wife with him in his journeys. But he knew that such a step would of necessity involve him in many cares, and impede his exertions in the cause of Christ. He therefore lived in celibacy himself, and recommended it to others, both men and women, especially during those seasons of persecution, when they were liable, every day and hour, to be called to lay down their lives for the gospel sake.^b Now, though there is not any necessity for us to imitate him in this individual act, yet we must admit the principle in its fullest extent, and live under its influence continually. We must study to be "without carefulness."^c We must endeavour to "serve the Lord as much as possible without distraction."^d We must "not entangle ourselves more than is necessary with the affairs of this life,"^e or multiply our cares in such a way as to rob our souls of the attention due to them. To do this would be as absurd as to "load our feet with thick clay,"^f when we were about to run a race. On the contrary, we should endeavour to "lay aside every weight,"^g conscious that cares of every kind impede our progress in the divine life, and, if suffered to increase, will endanger our ultimate success.^{h]}

2. Divested of selfish principles

[Never was a selfish spirit more subdued and mortified, than in the apostle Paul. Instead of claiming from the Corinthian church that support, which God himself had assigned to every minister of the gospel, he endured numberless wants and hardships, in order to set an example of disinterestedness to others.ⁱ And, when he himself was perfectly acquainted with the extent of Christian liberty, he "made himself the servant of all," becoming all things to all men, that by all means he might save some.^k Thus did he forego what he might have justly claimed, and consent, as it were, to pay, what none had any right to demand: he willingly sacrificed both his pecuniary rights, yea, and his Christian liberty too (as

^a γένεται refers to the manner in which the apostle ran: and προς to the end for which such exertion was necessary.

^b Ver. 5. with 1 Cor. vii. 1, 7, 8, 26, 27.

^c Ib. ver. 32.

^d 1 Cor. vii. 35.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 4.

^f Hab. ii. 6.

^g Heb. xii. 1.

^h Matt. xiii. 22.

ⁱ Ver. 12—15.

^j Ver. 19—22.

far as conscientiously he could) for the benefit of immortal souls.

Such is the way in which we are to run. But O, how many professors of religion have been retarded (yea, and have cast stumbling-blocks also in the way of others) by a rigorous exactation of their dues, or by an unwillingness to sacrifice their worldly interests! How many also have been kept from making a progress themselves, and from helping forward their fellow-sinners, by an unyielding zeal for Christian liberty, or a bigoted attachment to human forms! Happy would it be for every individual in the church of Christ, if a desire of advancement in the divine life disposed them to "look, not on their own things only, but also on the things of others;"¹ and "to seek the welfare of others in conjunction with, and (to a certain degree) in preference to, their own."²]

3. Determined, if possible, to win the prize

[They who proposed to contend in the race, maintained, for a long time before, the strictest temperance,³ and habituated themselves to the most laborious exertions. In reference to them, St. Paul tells us how careful he was to keep under his body, and to bring it into subjection in order that he might be the fitter to run the Christian race.⁴ Thus must we be trained both in body and mind, in order that we may run well and "endure unto the end." We must accustom ourselves to labour and self-denial, mortifying every corrupt affection, and "giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure"⁵— — —]

Let us next turn our attention to

II. The argument with which it is enforced

The apostle's expression is concise: but there is much implied in it.

1. We cannot win the race without running *in this manner*

[However persons strove for the mastery in the games they were not crowned, unless they strove according to the laws prescribed them.⁶ Thus, however earnest we may be in running for heaven, we never can gain the prize, unless we conform to the rules that have been laid down. This is the course that we are to run over. It abounds indeed with rough places, and steep ascents: but we must not deviate from it. We may easily find a smoother path; but we must run in that which is marked out for us, and abide in it to the end— — —

¹ Phil. ii. 4.

² 1 Cor. x. 24.

³ Ver. 25.

⁴ Ver. 27.

⁵ 2 Pet. i. 10.

⁶ 2 Tim. ii. 5.

Let us then enquire, whether we be treading in the apostle's steps———And let the fear of coming short at last, stimulate us to unremitting exertions———]

2. We are sure of winning, if we run in this manner

[Of those who contended in the race, one only could win the prize:^s but it is not so in the race that we run: every one that enters the lists, and exerts himself according to the directions given him, must succeed. None have any reason to despise on account of their own weakness; on the contrary, those who are the weakest in their own apprehension, are most certain of success———Only let us not be satisfied with "running well for a season;" but let us, "hold on our way," till we reach the goal.^t Then we need not fear but that we shall "finish our course with joy, and obtain a crown of righteousness from the hands of our righteous judge"^u———]

3. The prize, when obtained, will amply compensate for all our labour

[Poor and worthless as the prize was to him that won the race, the hope of obtaining it stimulated many to run for it. How much more then should the prize held forth to us, together with the certainty of obtaining it, call forth our exertions! Compare our prize with their's in respect of *honour*, *value*, and *duration*; how infinitely superior is it in every view! Their's was but the breath of man's applause; our's is honour coming from God himself. Their's was a green chaplet, that withered in an hour; our's is an incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading inheritance in heaven^x———

Let every one that is engaged in the race, survey the prize. Let him at the same time contemplate the consequence of coming short; (not a transient disappointment, or loss of some desirable object, but everlasting misery in hell) and the labour necessary to attain it will appear as nothing. None that have succeeded, *now* regret the pains they took to accomplish that great object: though thousands that have refused to run, now curse their folly with fruitless remorse———Let not any then relax their speed; but all attend to the directions given, and "so run that they may obtain the prize."^z]

^r See note ^o.

^s Ver. 24.

^t Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^u Col. iii. 23, 24. and 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

^x See note ⁿ.

CCCCXLIX. THE GLORY OF CHRIST.*

Heb. xiii. 8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

IN this present state, wherein the affairs both of individuals and of nations are liable to continual fluctuation, the mind needs some principle capable of supporting it under every adverse circumstance that may occur. Philosophy proffers its aid in vain: the light of unassisted reason is unable to impart any effectual relief: but revelation points to God; to God, as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: it directs our views to him who “changeth not;” and who, under all the troubles of life invites us to rely on his paternal care. Every page of the inspired writings instructs us to say with David, “When I am in trouble I will think upon God.” Are we alarmed with tidings of a projected invasion, and apprehensive of *national* calamities? God speaks to us as to his people of old,^a “Say ye not, a confederacy, to all to whom this people shall say, a confederacy, neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread; and he shall be to you for a sanctuary.” Are we agitated by a sense of *personal* danger? that same almighty Friend expositulates with us,^b “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” Are we, as in the present instance, afflicted for *the church of God*? has God taken away the pastor, who “fed you with knowledge and understanding?” and is there reason to fear, that now, your “Shepherd being removed, the sheep may be scattered,” that “grievous wolves^c may enter in among you, not sparing the flock; yea, that even of your own selves some may arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them?” Behold! such was the state of the Hebrews, when this Epistle was

* This was preached on occasion of the death of the Hon. and Rev. William Bromley Codogon, late Vicar of St. Giles’, Reading, on Jan. 29, 1797.

^a Isai viii. 12—14.

^b Isai. li. 12, 13.

^c Acts xx. 29, 30.

written to them: and the apostle, studious to fortify them against the impending danger, exhorts them to remember their deceased pastors, following their faith, and considering the blessed way in which they had terminated their career. Moreover, as the most effectual means of preserving them from being “carried about with any strange doctrines” different from what had been delivered to them, he suggests to them this thought, That Jesus Christ, who had been ever preached among them, and who was the one foundation of all their hopes, was still the same; the same infinitely gracious, almighty, and ever-blessed Saviour. “Remember,” says he, “them which have had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

These last words were chosen by your late worthy minister, as his subject on the first day of this year, and, as I am informed, were particularly recommended to you as your motto for the year ninety-seven. On this, as well as other accounts, they seem to claim peculiar attention from us: and, O that the good Spirit of God may accompany them with his blessing, while we endeavour to improve them, and to offer from them such considerations as may appear suited to you, under your present most afflictive circumstances!

Your late faithful, loving, and much beloved pastor is no more: he that was, not in profession merely, but in truth, “a guide of the blind, a light of them which were in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes;” he has for so many years spent all his time, and found all his delight, in imparting the knowledge of salvation both to old and young, he, I say, is taken from you; and your loss is unspeakably severe. But is all gone? No. He that formed him by his grace, raised him up to be a witness, and sent him to preach the gospel to you for a season, remains the same; he has still “the residue of the Spirit,” and can send forth ten thousand such labourers into his vineyard, whenssoever it shall please him. Though the creature, on whose lips you have so often hung with profit and delight, is now no more, yet the Creator, the Redcemer, the Saviour of the world is

still the same; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever: he is the same in the dignity of his person—the extent of his power—the virtue of his sacrifice—the tenderness of his compassion—and in fidelity to his promises.

I. In the dignity of his person. The terms “yesterday, to-day, and for ever,” are expressive of a true and proper eternity: they do not import merely a long duration, but an existence that never had a beginning, nor shall ever have an end. In this view they are frequently applied to Jehovah, to distinguish him from any creature, how exalted soever he might be. When God revealed his name to Moses, that name whereby he was to be made known to the Israelites, he called himself I AM: “say to them, I AM hath sent me unto you;” and St. John expressly distinguishing the Father both from Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, calls him the person “who is, and was, and is to come.” Now this august title is given repeatedly to Jesus Christ, both in the Old and New Testament. The very words of our text evidently refer to the 102d Psalm, where the Psalmist, indisputably speaking of Jehovah, says, “Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” And lest there should be the smallest doubt to whom this character belongs, the author of this epistle quotes the words in the very first chapter,^d insists upon them as immediately applicable to the Messiah, and adduces them in proof, that Christ was infinitely superior to any created being, even, “God blessed for evermore.” Our Lord himself on various occasions asserted his claim to this title: to the carnal Jews, who thought him a mere creature like themselves, he said, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” And when he appeared to John in a vision, he said, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” Behold then the dignity of our Lord and Saviour! “His goings forth have been from everlasting;”^e he was set up “from everlasting; from the beginning, or ever the

^d Heb. i. 12.^e Rev. i. 8.^f Micah v. 2.

earth was."^g We must say of him in the words of David, " From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." And is this a matter of small importance? Does the Christian feel no interest in this truth? Yea, is it not the very foundation of all his comforts? He may be deemed a bigot for laying such a stress on the divinity of Christ: but having once tasted the bitterness, and seen the malignity of sin, he is well persuaded, that the blood of a creature could never have availed to expiate his guilt, nor could any thing less than "the righteousness of God" himself, suffice for his acceptance in the day of judgment. Know then, believer, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: he is the eternal and immutable Jehovah: he is worthy of all thy love, of all thy trust, of all thy confidence. Thou needest never be afraid of thinking too highly of him: when thou "honourest him as thou honourest the Father," then thou regardest him in the manner that becomes thee: when thou bowest the knee before him, and confesses him as thy Sovereign Lord, then thou most effectually gloriest God the Father.^h Remember then, under all the trying dispensations thou mayest meet with, and, most of all, under the bereavement which thou art now so bitterly lamenting, that he, in whom thou hast believed, is an all-sufficient Saviour; and that when thou lookest to him for any blessing whatsoever, thou mayest cry with confident assurance, " My Lord, and my God." The ministers of the church "are not suffered to continue by reason of death." That tongue which lately was "as a tree of life," under the shadow of which you sat with great delight, and the fruit whereof was sweet unto your taste, now lies silent in the tomb. Our departed friend has experienced that change, which sooner or later awaits us all: he will ere long experience a still further change, when "his corruptible shall put on incorruption, and his mortal, immortality;" when his body, that now lies mouldering in the dust, shall be "raised like unto Christ's glorious body," and "shine above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever:" he is not to-day what he was yesterday; nor shall be for ever

^g Prov. viii. 23.

^h Phil. ii. 10, 11.

what he now is. This honour of eternal, immutable self-existence belongs not to the highest archangel; for though the angels may be subject to no further change, it was but yesterday that they were first created. To Christ alone belongs this honour; and “with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

II. As Jesus Christ is eternally the same in the dignity of his person, so is he also *in the extent of his power*. We are informed, both in the Psalm from whence the text is taken, and in the first chapter of this epistle, where it is cited, that Jesus Christ was the creator of the universe; “Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.” And from the first moment of its existence he has “upheld it by the word of his power.” In the days of his flesh, he still exercised the same omnipotence: “Whatsoever the Father did, that did the Son likewise.” On ten thousand occasions he wrought the most stupendous miracles, and shewed that every created being was subject to his will. He not only cleansed the lepers, and caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, but he raised the dead, cast out devils, and controlled the very elements, saying to the wind, Be still; and to the waves, Be calm. Nor, in this, did he act as one that had received a delegated authority; but as one who had an essential, and unalienable right to exercise universal dominion. Though, as man, he acknowledged subjection to his Father, and, as mediator, spake and acted in his Father’s name, yet, in all his miracles, he put forth a virtue inherent in himself; he made his own will the rule and measure of his conduct, and stamped the impression of divinity on all his actions. And is he not still the same? What he was yesterday, will he not also be to-day, and for ever? Is there any disorder of the soul or body, that he cannot heal? Are any lusts so raging, that he cannot calm them, or so inveterate, that he cannot root them out? Cannot he that formed the rude and indigested chaos into order and beauty, create our souls anew? Cannot he that said, “Let there be light, and there was light,” transform our corrupted hearts into the divine image in righteousness and true holiness? Can-

not he that “triumphed over all the principalities and powers” of hell, “bruise Satan under our feet also?” In short, “is there any thing too hard for him?” No, he is still the same: he, to whom “all power in heaven and in earth has been committed,” still holds the reins of government, and “ordereth all things after the counsel of his own will.” What comfort may not this afford you under your present affliction! It pleased him for a season to set over you a faithful pastor, by whom he has called hundreds into his fold, and “turned multitudes from the error of their ways.” But though your honoured minister was the instrument, he was only an instrument; he was but “an axe in the hands of him that heweth therewith,” an “earthen vessel in which was deposited the heavenly treasure,” and by whom Christ communicated to you his “unsearchable riches:” “The excellency of the power was altogether Christ’s.” And has the power ceased, because the instrument is laid aside? “Is the Lord’s ear heavy, that he cannot hear? or is his hand shortened, that he cannot save?” Oh remember, that though the stream is cut off, the fountain still remains; and every one of you may go to it, and “receive out of your Redeemer’s fulness grace for grace.” Yea, who can tell? That same almighty arm that raised *him* up to be a faithful witness for the truth, that enabled him to despise the pleasures and honours of the world, and to devote himself wholly to the great work of the ministry, can do the same for his successor. You well know, that he, whose loss we bemoan, was not always that able and excellent minister that he afterwards proved. Be not then hasty, if all things be not at first agreeable to your mind: exercise meekness, patience, forbearance: seek to obtain nothing by force or faction: let the whole of your conduct be conciliating, and worthy of your Christian profession: above all, continue instant in prayer: beg that “the Lord of the harvest, who alone can send forth faithful labourers into his harvest,” will pour out in a more abundant measure his grace upon him, who by the good providence of God is about to take the charge of you; and then I do not say, that God will *at all events* grant your requests; but this I say with confidence, That your prayers shall not fall to the ground; and that, if God, on the whole, will be most

glorified in that way, your petitions shall be literally fulfilled, and “the spirit of Elijah shall rest on Elisha.”

III. A third point, which it is of infinite importance to us to be acquainted with, is, that Christ is ever the same *in the virtue of his sacrifice*. Though he was not manifested in human flesh till four thousand years had elapsed, yet his sacrifice availed for the salvation of thousands during the whole of that period. The sacrifice, which Abel offered, did not obtain those distinguished tokens of divine acceptance on account of its intrinsic worth, but because the offerer looked forward by faith to that great sacrifice, which in the fulness of times was to be presented to God upon the cross, even to him, who, in purpose and effect, was the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” As for all other sacrifices, they had no value whatsoever; but as they typified that “one offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” When we see the high priest and the elders of Israel putting their hands upon the scape-goat, and transferring to him all the sins of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might be carried into the land of oblivion, then we behold the efficacy of Christ’s atonement. It is not to be imagined that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away sin—no: in every instance where the conscience of a sinner was really purged from guilt, the pardon was bestowed solely through “the blood of him, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God.” And is not that, which throughout all the Mosaic dispensation, and from the very beginning of the world, availed for the remission of sins, still as efficacious as ever to all who trust in it? or shall its virtue ever be diminished? Could David, after the commission of crimes, which “make the ears of every one that heareth them to tingle,” cry, “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;” and may not the most abandoned sinner now hope for mercy through “the blood of sprinkling?” Could Saul, that blasphemer, that injurious and persecuting zealot, say of Christ, “He has loved me, and given himself for me?” Could he say, “I obtained mercy, that in me, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who shall

hereafter believe on him to life everlasting?" And shall any one be left to doubt whether there be hope for *him*? Surely we may still say with the same confidence that the apostles declared it in the days of old, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: he is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world: through him all that believe shall be justified from all things: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from ALL sin." How sweetly have many of you experienced the truth of these declarations, when your dear minister has been insisting on this favourite topic, and "Christ has been set forth crucified, as it were, before your eyes!" How many of you, while lying at Bethesda's pool, have embraced the opportunity afforded you, and plunged beneath that water to the healing of your souls! Some others perhaps among you have been long hesitating, as it were, upon the brink, and doubting and questioning your right to wash in it: ah! chide your unbelief: know that "the fountain was opened for sin, and for uncleanness." Look not then so much at the malignity of your offences, as at the infinite value of Christ's atonement: and under every fresh contracted guilt, go to the fountain, wash in it, and be clean. Let there not be a day, if possible not an hour, wherein you do not make fresh application to the blood of Jesus: go to that to cleanse you, as well from "the iniquity of your most holy things," as from the more heinous violations of God's law; thus shall "your hearts be ever sprinkled from an evil conscience," and your "conscience itself be purged from dead works to serve the living God." There are some of you indeed, it is to be feared, who have hitherto disregarded the invitations given you, and are yet ignorant of the virtue of this all-atonning sacrifice: you have unhappily remained dry and destitute of the heavenly dew, which has long fallen in rich abundance all around you. How long you may continue favoured with such invitations, God only knows: but O that you might this day begin to seek the Lord! He that once died on Calvary, still cries to you by my voice, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." Now then, obey his voice: say to him, "Draw me that I may come unto thee; draw me,

and I will run after thee." Thus shall you be numbered among those, who are redeemed to God by his blood, and shall join, to all eternity, with your departed minister and all the glorified saints, in singing, "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."

IV. It will be a further consolation to us to reflect that Jesus Christ is the same *in the tenderness of his compassion*. It was Christ who led the people of Israel through the wilderness, and who directed them by his servant Moses. This appears from the express declaration of St. Paul. We are told that the Israelites "tempted God in the desert, saying, Can he give bread also, and provide flesh for his people?" And St. Paul, speaking of them, says, "Neither tempt ye CHRIST, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the destroyer."ⁱ Now the tender compassion which Christ exercised towards his people in the wilderness, is made a frequent subject of devout acknowledgement in the holy scriptures. Isaiah says, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."^k Moses himself, who both experienced and witnessed his compassion, describes it in terms as beautiful as imagination can conceive. See Deut. xxxii. 9, 12. "The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, in the waste-howling wilderness: he led him about; he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye." Then comes the image of which I speak: but in order to enter fully into its meaning, it will be proper to observe, that the eagle, when teaching her young to fly, flutters over them, and stirs them up to imitate her; she even thrusts them out of the nest, that they may be forced to exert their powers; and if she see them in danger of falling, she flies instantly underneath them, catches them on her wings, and carries them back to their nest. In reference to this it is added, "As an eagle

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 9.

^k Isaiah lxiii. 9.

stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him." Can any thing present a more beautiful idea to the mind? Can any image whatever more forcibly impress us with admiring thoughts of Christ's tenderness and compassion? Such was Jesus in the days of old: and is he not the same at this day? Will he not still "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young?" Can we produce in the annals of the world one single instance, wherein he "brake the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax?" Has he not invariably "brought forth judgment unto victory," and "perfected his own strength in his people's weakness?" Who amongst us has ever "sought his face in vain?" With whom has he ever refused to sympathize? Will not he who wept with the sisters of the deceased Lazarus; will not he that had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; will not he that wept over the murderous and abandoned city, now weep over a disconsolate widow, a deserted people, and especially over those, who have "not known the day of their visitation, and whose eyes have never yet seen the things belonging to their peace?" Is he become an "High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" or that, notwithstanding he has been "in all points tempted like as we are, has no disposition to succour his tempted people?" Unbelief and Satan may suggest such thoughts to our minds; but who must not attest, that they are false? Who is not constrained to acknowledge, that "he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?" Here then again let the drooping souls rejoice: ye, who are poor in this world, have lost a friend; a kind, compassionate friend, who, "according to his ability, and often beyond his ability," exerted himself to relieve your wants. Ye, who are of a broken and contrite spirit, ah! what a friend have ye lost! how would the departed saint listen to all your complaints, and answer all your arguments, and encourage you to look to Jesus for relief! what a delight was it to him to "strengthen your weak hands, and confirm your feeble knees, and to say to your fearful, hearts, Be strong, fear

not, your God will come and save you!" Ye, "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted," whatever your distresses were, surely ye have lost a brother, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." But though his benevolent heart can no more expand towards you, "has your Lord forgotten to be gracious? Has Jesus shut up his tender mercies?" No: to him you may still carry your complaints: he bids the weary and heavy-laden to come unto him: he "has received gifts," not for the indigent only, but "for the rebellious;" nor shall one of you be "sent empty away." Whom did he ever dismiss, in the days of his flesh, without granting to him the blessing he desired? So now, if ye will go unto him, he "will satiate every weary soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul;" he "will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that God may be glorified."

V. The last observations we proposed to make, was, that Christ is the same in his fidelity to his promises. We have before shewn, that he led his people through the wilderness: he had promised to cast out all their enemies, and to give them "a land flowing with milk and honey." And behold, Joshua, at the close of a long life, and after an experience of many years, could make this appeal to all Israel: "Ye know in all your hearts,¹ and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." The same fidelity did Jesus manifest, while he sojourned upon earth: the Father had committed to him a chosen people to keep: and Jesus with his dying breath could say, "Those, whom thou gavest me, I have kept, and none of them is lost." He promised to his disconsolate disciples, that he would pour out his Spirit upon them; and that the Comforter, whom he would send, should far more than compensate for the loss of his bodily presence: and, how speedily did he perform his promise! Thus, in every succeeding age, have his people

¹ Josh. xxiii. 14.

found him faithful. He has “ given exceeding great and precious promises” to his church, not one jot or tittle of which have ever failed. They who have rested on his word, have never been disappointed. Enthusiasts indeed, who have put their own vain conceits in the place of his word, and have presumed to call their own feelings or fancies by the sacred appellation of a promise, have often met with disappointments; nor can they reasonably expect any thing else: but they who rest upon the clear promises of the gospel, and wait for the accomplishment of them to their own souls, “ shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end.” Let any creature upon earth, “ seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” and shall he be left wholly destitute with respect to *temporal* comforts? No: he perhaps may be severely tried for a season; but ere long he shall have “ all needful things added unto him.” Let a sinner “ whose sins have been of a scarlet or crimson dye,” make application to the Lord for mercy; and shall he ever be cast out? No, “ in no wise,” provided he come simply trusting in the Saviour’s righteousness. Let any man seek deliverance from the snares of Satan, by whom he has been led captive at his will; and shall he be left in bondage to his lusts? Most surely not, if he will rely on him who has said, “ sin shall not have dominion over you, because ye are not under the law, but under grace.” Now it may be, that many of you have been promising yourselves much spiritual, perhaps also some temporal advantage, from your deceased minister: and behold! in an instant, all your hopes are blasted: the creature, though so excellent, proves in this respect but a broken reed. But, if you will look to Christ, you cannot raise your expectations too high: he is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever: you may rely on him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity: he will be to you a “ sun and a shield; he will give you both grace and glory; nor will he withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly.” If he see it necessary that for a season you should be “ in heaviness through manifold temptations,” he will make your trials to work for good; and “ your light and momentary afflictions shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:” only

commit your souls to him in well-doing, and he will “keep you by his Almighty power, through faith, unto salvation.”

In the *improvement* which we would make of this subject, we beg leave once more to notice the words that immediately precede the text; “Remember them that have had the rule over you, that have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” We may appear indeed, in this, to draw your attention from Christ, and to fix it on the creature. But we shall still keep in view our main subject; and at once consult the scope of the context, the peculiarity of this occasion, and the feelings of your hearts.

First then, “Remember him who has had the rule over you, and has preached unto you the word of God.” Surely I need not say much to enforce this part of the exhortation: he is deeply engraven on your hearts, nor will the remembrance of him be soon effaced from your minds. Many of you would have “even plucked out your own eyes and have given them unto him,” if by so doing you could have conferred upon him any essential benefit: yea, I doubt not, there are many in this assembly that would gladly, very gladly, have laid down their lives in his stead, that so great a blessing as he was, might yet have been continued to the church of God. It cannot be but that the poor must long remember their generous and constant benefactor. Many of the children too, I trust, whom he so delighted to instruct, will remember him to the latest period of their lives. Above all, the people, who looked upon him as their spiritual father, to whom they owed their own souls, will bear him in remembrance. They will never forget “how holily, justly, and unblameably he behaved himself among them,” and how “he exhorted and comforted and charged every one of them, as a father doth his children, that they would walk worthy of God; who hath called them unto his kingdom and glory.” Deservedly will his name be reverenced in this place for ages; for “he was a burning and a shining light;” and had so uniformly persisted in well-doing, that he had utterly “put to silence the

ignorance of foolish men," and made religion respectable in the eyes of the most ungodly.

Let me proceed then in the next place to say, "Follow his faith." What his faith was, you well know. Christ was the one foundation of all his hopes. He desired "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And as he trusted in no other for his own salvation, so he preached no other amongst you. He had "determined, like St. Paul, to know nothing amongst you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Every discourse he preached, tended immediately or remotely to glorify Christ amongst you: if he preached the law, it was that, as a schoolmaster, it might lead you to Christ: if he insisted upon obedience, it was that you might "glorify Christ by your bodies and your spirits which are Christ's." In short, Christ was, as well in his ministrations as in the inspired writings, "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last." Were he preaching to you at this moment, I am persuaded he would have no other theme; yea, if to the end of the world he were continued to preach unto you, you would hear of nothing but Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It was this which made his ministry so acceptable unto you: it was this which God rendered useful to the conversion and consolation of multitudes amongst you. By the faith of Christ he lived, and in the faith of Christ he died. Almost the last words he uttered were these, "Weep not for me; I am very happy, I DIE IN THE FAITH OF THE LORD JESUS." I have been anticipated in one remarkable circumstance which I had intended to mention to you: and I am unwilling to omit it now, because there may be some here who were not present this morning. Indeed it is so applicable to my subject, and so illustrative of the character of your dear pastor, that I may well be excused if I repeat what you have already heard. That blessed man, though he possessed a very considerable share of human learning, valued no book in comparison of the Scriptures: when therefore he found his dissolution approaching, he desired his dear partner to read a portion of the word of

God: she immediately read to him, first the 23d Psalm, and afterwards the 8th chapter of Proverbs. In the last verse but one of that chapter, she came to these words; “ Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” Immediately, without waiting for her to conclude the chapter, he cried, “ Stop, stop; now shut up the book; that is enough for me.” Blessed man! he had sweetly experienced the truth of those words; he had found life in Christ Jesus; he had obtained favour of the Lord; and he knew that he was going to dwell with his Lord for ever. Such was his faith. He held fast Christ as his “ wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his complete redemption.” He made “ Christ his all, and in all.” But while he trusted in Christ alone for his justification before God, no man living ever more forcibly inculcated the necessity of good works, or, I may truly add, practised them with more delight. He was also a firm friend to the established church, and inculcated on all occasions submission to the constituted authorities of this kingdom. He considered obedience to the powers that be, as an essential part of his duty to God: he looked upon earthly governors as ministers ordained of God; and, inculcated obedience to them as a duty, “ not merely for wrath, but also for conscience sake.” As then ye have been followers of his faith and practice while living, so be ye imitators of him now that he is withdrawn from you: “ be ye followers of him, as he was of Christ.” And be careful “ not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines,” either in religion or politics; but “ hold fast that ye have received, that no man take your crown.” If there be any here, who have never yet been “ partakers of the like precious faith with him,” O that I might this day prevail with them to “ become obedient to the faith!” My dear brethren, you will assuredly find, that the only means of holiness in life, or of peace in death, or of glory in eternity, is, the knowledge of Christ: “ there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved” from sin and misery in this world, or from everlasting destruction in the world to come; no other name, I say, but the name of Jesus Christ. I must therefore entreat you now to reflect on those things, which hitherto ye have heard without effect; and I pray God,

that the seed, which has lain buried in the earth, may spring up speedily, and bring forth fruit an hundred-fold.

I add now in the last place, “Consider the end of your departed minister’s conversation.” You have heard how peaceful and resigned he was in the prospect of death, and what an assured and glorious hope of immortality he enjoyed. “Mark the perfect man,” says David, “and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace;” this you have seen verified in him. But carry your thoughts a little further: follow him within the vail: behold him united to that blessed assembly of saints and angels: see him freed from the bondage of corruption, arrayed in the unspotted robe of his Redeemer’s righteousness, crowned with a royal diadem, seated on a throne of glory, tuning his golden harp, and with a voice as loud and as melodious as any saint in heaven, singing, “Salvation to God and to the Lamb.” Is there so much as one of you that can think of this, and not exclaim, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” Let the thought of these things, my brethren, encourage you to persevere: the conflict cannot be very long, but how glorious the triumph! Consider this, I beseech you; that you “may fight the good fight of faith, and quit yourselves like men.” Go on, “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;” and doubt not, but that you shall find the grace of Christ as sufficient for you, as it has been for him; and that what Christ has been to others in former ages, he will be to you, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

CCCCL. PUTTING OFF THE OLD MAN, AND PUTTING ON THE NEW.

Eph. iv. 22—24. *That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your minds; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

CHRISTIANITY is universally professed amongst us—But many know little more of it than the name—They,

who are in some measure acquainted with its principles, have, for the most part, learned it only from books and human instruction—But there are some who have learned it, as it were, from Christ himself—Their understandings have been opened, and their hearts instructed by his good Spirit—These are said to “have heard Christ, and to have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus”^a—These may be distinguished from the others by the effects of their knowledge—While the speculative Christian remains willingly ignorant of true holiness, the truly enlightened man labours to attain the highest measure of it that he can—This St. Paul represents as the infallible consequence of divine teaching—And his declarations respecting it set forth the sum and substance of a Christian’s duty

I. Put off the old man

There are many terms peculiar to the holy scriptures which need to be explained—Those in the text are of the greatest importance—

“The old man” is that principle of sin which actuates the unregenerate man

[It is a *natural principle*—As a man consists of a soul with many faculties, and a body with many members, so does this principle, though but one, consist of many parts: pride, unbelief, &c. &c. constitute that body of sin, which is here denominated “the old man”—And it is called “old,” because it is coeval with our existence, and is derived from our first parents, after whose fallen image we were made—It is a *corrupt principle*—It is expressly called so in the text—All its *inward* “lustings” and desires are vitiated, and invariably discover themselves by the *external* fruits of a vain “conversation”—It is also a “deceitful” principle, continually representing good as evil, and evil as good—It constantly disappoints our expectations, making that to appear a source of happiness which never yet terminated in any thing but misery—]

This it is our duty to be “putting off”

[It is indeed no easy matter to effect this work—Yet in dependence on God’s aid we *may*, and *must*, accomplish it—We must *suppress its actings*—It will break forth, if not resisted, into all manner of *evil*^b—But we must fight against it,

^a Ver. 21.

^b See the following context.

and “bring it into subjection”^c—Our eternal life and salvation depend on our “mortifying the deeds of the body”^d—Not contented with a partial victory, we must *check its desires*—A weight that may be easily stopped when beginning to roll, will prove irresistible when it is running down a steep declivity—We must check evil in its first rising, if we would not be overpowered by it—None can tell how far he shall go when once he begins to fall—We must therefore “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts”^e—To do this effectually, we must *guard against its deceits*—We should examine our motives and principles of action—Sin is deceitful; the heart also is deceitful; and Satan helps forward our deceptions—That which is very specious in its outward appearance, is often most odious to the heart-searching God—We must therefore bring every thing to the touchstone of God’s word—We must “prove all things, and hold fast that which is good”^f]—]

But we must not be satisfied with resisting sin—We must

II. Put on the new man

“The new man” is that principle which actuates the godly

[It consists of many parts, as well as the evil principle—Humility, faith, love, &c. are among its most characteristic features—It is *divine in its origin*—It belongs to no man *naturally*; but is “new”—It is the gift of God, the work of his good Spirit—It is “created” within us, and is as truly the workmanship of God, as the universe itself is—All who possess it are said to be “God’s workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus unto good works*”^g—It is moreover *holy in its operations*—All its motions and tendencies are holy—It works to transform us “after God’s image”—It leads to an unreserved obedience to both tables of the law—It directs to “righteousness” towards man, and “holiness” towards God—Nor will it be satisfied with any semblance of religion however, specious—It labours uniformly to bring us to the experience of “*true*” holiness both in heart and life—]

This it is our duty to be putting on

[As the prodigal was not merely pardoned, but clothed in robes suitable to his new condition, so are the children of God to be adorned with virtues suited to the relation which they bear to their heavenly Father—We must be “renewed,” not in our outward actions only, but “in the spirit of our minds”—The great spring of action within us must be chang-

^c 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^f 1 Thess. v. 21.

^d Rom. viii. 13.

^g Eph. ii. 10.

^e Gal. v. 24.

ed, and “the new man” must reign in us now, as “the old man” did in our unregenerate state—Do we ask, How shall this great work be effected? We answer, *Encourage its motions, and exert its powers*—The new principle of life in us is as water, which seeks continually to extinguish the corrupt principle within us—And if, upon any temptation occurring, we watched carefully the motions of that principle, we should frequently, *perhaps* invariably, find it directing us to what is right—But it is “a still small voice” that cannot be heard without much attention—And it may be very soon silenced by the clamours of passion or interest—It is the voice of God within us; and, if duly regarded, would never suffer us to err in any great degree—It has also powers, which like the members of the body may be strengthened by exertion—Put forth its powers in the exercise of faith and love, and it will be found to grow as well as any other habit—Having indeed the tide of corrupt nature against it, its progress will not be so rapid, nor will it admit of any intermission of our labours—But the more we do for God, the more shall we be disposed, and enabled, to do for him—We must however remember not to address ourselves to this duty in our own strength—Of ourselves we can do nothing; but if we rely on the promised grace of Christ, we shall be strengthened by his Spirit, and be “changed into his image from glory to glory”—]

We may *improve* this subject

1. For conviction

[If this progressive change be the necessary evidence of our being true Christians, alas! how few true Christians are there to be found!—Yet nothing less than this will suffice—If we be really “in Christ, we are new creatures; old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new”^h—It is not an external reformation merely that we must experience, but a new creation—Let all reflect on this—Let all enquire what evidence they have of such a change having passed upon their souls—The voice of Christ to all of us is this; “YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN; except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven”ⁱ—]

2. For consolation

[Many are ready to despond because of the severe conflicts which they experience between the spiritual and the carnal principle in their souls—They say, If I were a child of God, how could it be thus?—We answer, This is rather an evidence that such persons are partakers of a divine nature—If they were not, they would be strangers to these conflicts—

^h 2 Cor. v. 17.

ⁱ John iii. 3, 7.

Though they might feel some struggles between reason and conscience, they would know nothing of those deeper conflicts between the flesh and spirit—These evince the existence of a new principle, though they shew that the old man still lives within them^k—Let not any then despond because they feel the remains of indwelling corruption, but rather be thankful if they hate it, and if they have grace in some good measure to subdue it—Let them trust in God to “perfect that which concerns them”—And look to him to “fulfil in them all the good pleasure of his goodness”—Then shall they in due time put off their filthy garments, altogether, and stand before their God without spot or blemish to all eternity—]

^k Gal. v. 17.

CCCCLI. THE CHURCH'S UNION WITH CHRIST.

Rev. xix. 7, 8. *Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted, that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean, and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*

THERE are some passages of scripture which are particularly marked, as it were, by God himself, in order that we might be aware of their importance, and give to them the attention they deserve. The destruction of anti-christ, and the establishment of Christ's universal kingdom, are here represented as already effected, and as being the subjects of most exalted joy to all the hosts of heaven. And that the church of God in all ages might look forward with earnestness to these glorious events, St. John was ordered to write them in a book, and to declare with more than ordinary solemnity, that “they were the true sayings of God.”

Without entering too minutely into the figure by which the church's connexion with Christ is here expressed, we observe in general, that

I. There is an union with Christ to be enjoyed

[The connexion of believers with Christ is sometimes represented by a branch united to the vine, and a member to the head: but here it is set forth under the figure of a

marriage union. This is frequent both in the Old and New Testament^a — — — And the propriety of such a representation is manifest; since the soul, as soon as ever it believes in Christ, becomes “one spirit with Christ;”^b and, while it consecrates to him all its faculties, is admitted to a participation of all his honours and benefits.]

II. There is a meetness for that union to be attained

[The “Lamb’s bride” can never be admitted to a full enjoyment of her privileges till “she have made herself ready.” Doubtless the righteousness with which the believer must be clothed in order to his *justification*, is none other than that which Jesus himself “brought in” by his obedience unto death; and which is “unto all, and upon all them that believe.”^c But that, to which the text refers, seems rather to be the inherent righteousness, whereby we are rendered meet for the enjoyment of heaven.^d This is no less necessary than the other; because it would be unworthy of the Lord to receive into so near a relation to himself one who *still continued* in an unrenewed state,^e and because no one could enjoy such a relation without having first obtained a suitable temper and disposition of mind.^f]

III. The union itself will be a ground of much joy and thankfulness

[The text is verified whosoever a person is truly converted to God. Then is the soul “presented as a chaste virgin to Christ,”^g and an union is formed, that shall never be dissolved. And is not this a matter of joy? yes: even the angels of God rejoice at such a sight:^h much more therefore must they rejoice, who are thus united to the Lord.

But the nuptials mentioned in the text are those of the church in the latter days, when both Jews and Gentiles shall form one mystical body, and be united to Christ their common head.ⁱ Then will “the king’s daughter be all glorious within, and her clothing be of wrought gold;”^k in other words, universal holiness, both in heart and life, will prevail throughout the world,^l and the whole human race be admitted to the

^a This figure is used by Isaiah liv. 5. Ezekiel xvi. 8. Hosea ii. 19. and through the whole book of Canticles. It is also used by the Baptist, John iii. 29. and St. John, Rev. xxi. 2, 9. and St. Paul, Eph. v. 31, 32. and Christ himself, Matt. ix. 15. and xxii. 2.

^b 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^c Dan. ix. 24. and Rom. iii. 22. and x. 4.

^d Col. i. 12.

^e Ib.

^f John iii. 3.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^h Luke xv. 10.

ⁱ Eph. i. 10. ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι.

^k Ps. xlv. 13—15.

^l Isaiah lx. 21. and Eph. v. 27.

most intimate fellowship with their Lord and Saviour. What a blessed event will this be! If the nuptials of an earthly prince be a matter of general congratulation, how much more will heaven and earth unite to celebrate this marriage! Well might the angel say, "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."^m]

This subject may be IMPROVED

1. For our conviction

[The representation of our conversion to God under the figure of a marriage naturally leads us to enquire, What reason we have to think that we are thus nearly related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we ever given ourselves unreservedly to him? Are we maintaining sweet intercourse with him in secret? And are we so adorned with all holy graces, that our relation to him is visible in our whole deportment? If we be not thus "making ourselves ready" for him now, we cannot hope to be acknowledged as his bride, in the great day of his appearing.]

2. For our consolation

[It is often a subject of bitter lamentation to us, that our fellowship with Christ is so rare and transient. But "this is not the place of our rest:" in this world we are only, as it were, betrothed; and have time given us to provide the wedding-garments. It is in heaven that our happiness is to be consummated. Let the interval then be improved in preparation for our future bliss: and soon the time shall come, when "we shall be for ever with the Lord. Comfort ye one another with these words."ⁿ]

^m Ver. 9. See also Isaiah xliv. 23.

ⁿ 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

CCCCLII. LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

1 Pet. i. 22. *Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently,*

AS our Christian *profession* lays us under peculiar obligations to holiness, so our Christian *experience* should influence us to exert ourselves as much as possible in the service of our God—The more we have attained, the more we should aspire after still higher at-

tainments—To this effect is St. Peter's exhortation in the passage before us—In his words we may observe

I. What he takes for granted respecting all true Christians

The apostle, writing to those who professed to be followers of Christ, gives them credit that they were his disciples *indeed*; and takes for granted

1. That they had “obeyed the truth”

[To “obey the truth” is, in scripture-language, the same as to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—The substance of the divine record is, that in Christ Jesus there is life, and that we either have life or are destitute of it, according as we possess, or are destitute of, the knowledge of Christ^a—This is the true record of God, which we are enjoined to receive with all humility and thankfulness—And when we so embrace it as to found all our hopes of salvation entirely upon it, then we may properly be said to obey the truth—Now *this* every Christian does; he does not merely give his assent to any propositions about Christ, but he “flees to Christ for refuge,” and relies upon him as his only Saviour—And the apostle takes for granted (with good reason too) that they to whom he was writing, had *so* received Christ; for, however they might have been baptized into the faith of Christ, they were no better than mere heathens, if they had not truly believed in him—]

2. That in obeying the truth they had also “purified their souls”

[We may cleanse the outward part of our conduct by various means—A regard to our reputation, a self-righteous desire of recommending ourselves to God, or a spirit of pride and self-complacency, will be sufficient to rectify in a measure our external behaviour; but it is the property of faith alone to purify the heart^b—And as nothing but faith will prevail for this end, so wherever faith is, it will infallibly produce this effect^c—The faith that has not this fruit is dead; and will no more avail for our salvation than the faith of devils^d—Well therefore does the apostle take it for granted, that they, to whom he wrote, experienced this effect of their faith; seeing that it is the principal intent of the gospel to insure and produce it^e]—

^a 1 John v. 11, 12.

^d Jam. ii. 19, 20.

^b Acts xv. 9.

^c 1 John iii. 3.

^e Tit. ii. 11, 12.

3. That they had so purified their souls as to have attained an unfeigned love of the brethren

[As faith purifies the heart, so in a more especial manner it “works by love”^f—The love of the brethren never was, nor ever can be, found in an unrenewed soul—There may be a semblance of it; there may be a partial attachment to our own sect and party, or a carnal attachment to a person who is spiritually minded; but there never can be a love to spiritual persons simply on account of their relation to Christ, and their conformity to his image—But let the smallest portion of true grace be imparted to the soul, and instantly this love will spring up in the heart—Many things indeed may occur in the mind to restrain its exercise for a season, and to impede its growth; but it may be taken for granted that this principle both abides and operates in the heart of every true Christian; “he that loveth him that begat, cannot but love those who are begotten of him”^g]—

4. That they had attained all this through the influence of the Holy Spirit.

[Faith itself cannot exist in the heart, till the Spirit of God has wrought it in us; he must overcome our reluctance, and make us willing to obey the truth^h—Neither can our hearts be purified but by the same almighty power—Faith indeed is the instrument whereby our sanctification is effected; but the Holy Spirit is the agent—Every progressive step of it must be wrought by himⁱ—Our love can flow from no other source; whatever be the grace that is exercised by us, he must be acknowledged as the author of it; “it is the same Spirit that worketh all in all”^k]—

If what is here taken for granted be really found in us, nothing will be more acceptable than

II. The exhortation grounded upon it

“The end of the commandment,” says the apostle, “is charity;” and our profession as Christians supposes that it exists, and operates, in our hearts—But care must be taken that it be exercised

1. With sincerity

[There is a politeness and civility which is only a counterfeit of Christian love—But it is not this which the text inculcates—We are indeed commanded in other parts of scripture

^f Gal. v. 6.

^g 1 John v. 1.

^h Ps. cx. 3.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 13.

^k 1 Cor. xli. 7—11.

to "be courteous;" and it would be well if some professors of religion paid more attention to this command—But the love enjoined in the text, is an "unfeigned" love to all the saints, arising from a view of their relation to God, and to ourselves—It must be an abiding principle in our hearts, operating uniformly in the whole of our conduct towards them—It must lead us to exercise meekness, forbearance and forgiveness, and to seek both their temporal and spiritual welfare, as occasion may serve¹—In short, our love must be without dissimulation;^m it must be not in word, and in tongue, but in deed, and in truthⁿ]—

2. With purity

[Even where there is a portion of Christian love, there may be a considerable alloy mixed with it—We may be influenced too much by selfish considerations—We may be seeking our own interest or honour, while we imagine that we are giving a testimony of Christian love—Yea, our love which was pure at first, may easily degenerate into mere carnal affection—The greatest caution is necessary, especially among young persons, lest our hearts betray us into indiscretion of any kind, and Satan take advantage of us to lead us into sin—]

3. With fervour

[An empty profession of benevolence to the poor will not be deemed equivalent to an actual relieving of their wants; nor will a cold expression of regard to the brethren fulfil the sacred duty of love to them—In the latter especially, it should know no bounds, but those which were affixed to the love of Christ—Did he love us to such a degree as to lay down his life for us? we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren^o—There is no service, however difficult or self-denying, which we should not render them for good—To sum up all in one word, we should love one another, as Christ has loved us^p]—

APPLICATION

1. Enquire whether the things here taken for granted be found in us

[Have we indeed received the Holy Ghost? and through his almighty influence have we believed in Christ, and purified our souls, and got a principle of holy love implanted in us?——And do these attainments become so many motives to diligence, and means of spiritual advancement?—Let this be duly weighed, and it will serve to shew us what we are—if we be

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^m Rom. xii. 9.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 18.

^o 1 John iii. 16.

^p Eph. v. 1, 2. John xv. 12.

in the faith, our self-examination will increase our comfort; and, if we be not in the faith, it may be the means of carrying conviction to the soul—Let us be assured that faith, love, and holiness universally characterize the Christian, and that our evidences of conversion will bear an exact proportion to our attainments in these things^a—Let therefore our exercise of these graces be so manifest and undeniable, that the Spirit's agency in us may be confessed by all^r]

2. Endeavour to fulfil the duties that are here imposed on us

[A sweeter command cannot possibly be given—To obey it is to enjoy an heaven upon earth—Heaven is a region of ineffable, unceasing love; and the more we have of that divine principle the more happy shall we be—Let us then strive to mortify whatever may retard its growth in our souls—Let us beware lest through the abounding of iniquity it wax cold—And let us strive to exercise it with all that purity and fervour which become persons so highly privileged—]

^a 1 John iii. 19.

^r John xiii. 35. and Isaiah lxi. 9.

CCCCLIII. ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE WEAK.

Isaiah xxxv. 3, 4. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

OUR blessed Lord, as the great shepherd of the sheep, has set an example to all inferior pastors how to watch over their flocks.^a And in the words before us he gives them special direction how to treat the weak and the diseased.

I. Consider the characters here described

Among the people of God, all of whom are weak as sheep, there are many that, from their peculiar weakness and infirmities, are characterized rather as “lambs, or as sheep that are big with young.” These are described in the text

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16. Isaiah xl. 11.

1. As feeling their weakness

[The “hands and feet” being those members of the body that are fitted for labour, they not improperly represent the active powers of the soul: and the feebleness which they experience through excessive fatigue, gives us a just idea of a soul weary with its labours, and heavy laden with its spiritual burthens. Many there are that are precisely in this state: they have been maintaining a conflict with sin and Satan; they have been enduring the pressure of many trials; and they scarcely know how to support their difficulties any longer: their “hands are so weak and their knees so feeble,” that they are ready to give up in utter despair^b— —]

2. As discouraged by reason of it

[Many are the misgiving thoughts that arise in the minds of God’s tempted people. When they find their insufficiency to support their burthens, and to overcome their spiritual enemies, they have “great searchings of heart:” they begin to doubt whether they have not altogether deceived their own souls; and whether they may not as well cease from those contests which they have hitherto found so ineffectual. They fear that God has cast them off; that all their professions are mere hypocrisy; and that their renewed exertions will only issue in their greater disappointment^c— —]

If there be any present, whose experience accords with this description, we proceed to

II. Deliver to them a message from the most high God

God would not that his ministers should ever “break a bruised reed,” or “despise the day of small things:” on the contrary, he says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people” “Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.” But because *we* should be at a loss to know what to say, and all that we could say would be to no purpose, if it were the mere offspring of our own imaginations, God himself has put words into our mouths; which therefore we may safely, and confidently, deliver

[Let the drooping and disconsolate now listen as to the voice of God himself; for it is God, and not man, that thus audibly speaks unto them.

“Be strong, fear not.” This may appear a strange address

^b This may be illustrated by David’s case, Ps. xxxviii. 2—8, 17.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 2—9.

to those who feel within themselves such reason for despondency: but it is God's message to them; and therefore in God's name we deliver it.

But in the text the grounds of this encouragement are stated: and, if duly applied to the soul, they are sufficient to comfort the most distressed, and to invigorate the weakest. "Behold then, your God will come:" yes, that God who, notwithstanding all your fears, is, and will be, *your God*. Think what is implied in this relation, and then say, whether you have not in this word alone an inexhaustible fund of consolation.

He will come "with vengeance" to your enemies, and "with a recompence" to you. He sees with indignation those evil spirits that assault you, and those ungodly men that despise and persecute you, and all those indwelling lusts that harass and defile you; and he has doomed them all to destruction; your lusts, by the operation of his grace, and your enemies, whether men or devils, by his avenging arm. But with respect to yourselves, there is not a tear, which he has not treasured up in his vial;^d nor a sigh, a groan,^e a purpose,^f a wish,^g a thought,^h which he has not noted in the book of his remembrance, in order to recompense it at the resurrection of the just.

In short, "he will come and save you." He is interested in your welfare; and suffers you to be thus tried, and tempted, only for your good.ⁱ He knows "when your strength is gone," and will make your extremity the season of his effectual interposition.^k

Notice the repetitions in this message; for they surely were not inserted thus for nought. It is "*God, even God*," that will come for your relief: it is not a man, or an angel, but JEHOVAH himself, to whom all things are alike possible, and alike easy. Moreover, it is said "*He will come, he WILL come*:" you need not doubt it, for it is as certain as that he himself exists. He may tarry long: but wait his leisure; and he will come at last.^j

INFER

1. How anxious is God for the comfort of his people!

[He charges all his servants to exert themselves for the relief of his people's minds: and expressly sends them a message of love and mercy under their multiplied afflictions. And, lest they should put away from them the word as not applicable to themselves, he describes them, not by their at-

^d Ps. lvi. 8.

^e Ps. xxxviii. 8, 9.

^f 1 Kings viii. 18.

^g 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^h Mal. iii. 16.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 6.

^k Deut. xxxii. 36.

^l Hab. ii. 3. with 2 Chron. xv. 7.

tainments, but by their defects; not by their hopes, but by their fears. *He describes them by the very terms which they themselves make use of to describe their own state.* What marvellous condescension is this! Moreover, he sends them exactly such a message as they themselves would desire, if they were commissioned to declare beforehand what they would consider as an adequate ground of consolation. Can any thing exceed this kindness!

Let us then entertain worthy conceptions of our gracious God; and learn never to doubt his love, or to distrust his care. And, instead of distressing ourselves with fears on account of our own weakness, let us look unto our almighty Saviour to "perfect his own strength by means of it."^m]

2. How differently must ministers conduct themselves towards the different objects of their care!

[That same divine shepherd who says, "I will strengthen that which was sick," adds, "But I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment."ⁿ Now there are many who perhaps will bless themselves, that they are strangers to the faintings and fears which are so distressing to others. What message then have we from God to *them*? Shall we endeavour to "confirm and strengthen" them? They need not our assistance; they would despise our proffered help. Shall we say to them, "Be strong, fear not!" Alas! how "shall they be strong in the day that God shall deal with them?"^o They rather need to fear and tremble for the judgments that are coming upon them. "God is coming," but he is not *their* God; for they have never chosen him for their God, nor given themselves up to him as his people. He is coming with awful "vengeance," and with a just "recompence" for all their neglect of him. He is coming not to "save," but to destroy them. Let them then hear the message of God to *them*;^p and tremble. They must be sick in order to know the value of a physician; and must feel themselves lost, if ever they would be interested in the salvation of Christ.^q]

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxiv. 16. before cited.

^o Ezek. xxii. 14. and Isai. x. 3.

^p 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

^q Mark ii. 17. Luke xviii. 13, 14.

CCCCLIV. THE DUTY OF CHARITY ENFORCED.

Deut. xv. 7—11. *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release is at hand: and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought, and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in the land.*

THE existence of various ranks and orders among men is the necessary consequence of civilization—A perfect equality among them is impossible in the nature of things: nor, if it were made to exist, could it continue for any time—An inequality of condition is even far more conducive to the general good, not only in that it tends to keep up a due subordination of the lower to the higher classes, but that it binds all the classes of men together by the ties of mutual usefulness and dependence—Even in the state that was formed by God himself, it was ordained that such a diversity of ranks should subsist^a—Still, however, it never was the divine intention that some should be left destitute of all the comforts of life, while others rioted in opulence and prodigality—To prevent this he commanded his people to forgive the poor their debts at the year of release^b—And enjoined all who should enjoy a comparative state of affluence, to relieve the poor indigent—

^a “The poor shall never cease out of the land,” ver. 11.

^b He assigns as his reason for this ordinance, “to the end that there may be no poor among you,” ver 3, 4. See the translation in the margin of the Bible.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider

I. The duty enjoined

God commanded his people to exercise liberality to the poor

[He had appointed every seventh year to be a year of release^c—By this means the poor could not be oppressed for any length of time—But this very law might also tend to the disadvantage of the poor—To prevent any such evil consequence, God ordered that his people should be equally favourable to the poor notwithstanding the year of release—He enjoined the rich to lend to the poor, even under a moral certainty of losing their debt—Yea, they were to perform this duty in a bountiful and willing manner—]

His injunctions to them are, as far as respects the spirit of them, equally binding upon us

[God requires us to “do good and *lend, hoping for nothing again*”^d—And certainly this is our duty—The relation which the poor bear to us necessarily involves in it this obligation—The scriptures at large, as well as the immediate expressions in the text, inculcate this duty in the strongest terms^e—

The manner also of performing this duty is as strongly enjoined as the duty itself. We must act *bountifully* towards the poor, proportioning our alms to our own ability, and, as far as possible, to their necessities^g—We must also administer relief *cheerfully*—Grudging and niggardly thoughts are apt to arise in our minds: but they proceed from a “wicked heart;” and must be guarded against with all possible circumspection^h

^c Ver. 1, 2.

^d Luke vi. 35.

^e They are *four times* in the text called, “our brethren.” The force of this idea is admirably expressed, Job xxxi. 15—19. and it is further confirmed by the words of our Lord, Matt. xxv. 40.

^f “*Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand—Thou shalt surely lend—surely give—I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide,*” &c. See this enjoined on all generally, Luke xi. 41. on all individually, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. and in the most solemn manner, 1 Tim. vi. 17, “*Charge,*” &c.

^g “*Thou shalt open thine hand wide—lend him sufficient for his need.*” See true bountifulness defined, 2 Cor. viii. 12. exemplified, 2 Cor. viii. 2. encouraged, 2 Cor. ix. 6.

^h “*Beware, &c.—and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother—thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest,*” &c. See similar directions, Rom. xii. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 18. “*Ready to distribute; willing to communicate.*”

—Our alms are *then only* acceptable to God, when they are offered with a willing mindⁱ]—

To call forth a just sense of our duty, let us consider
II. The arguments with which it is enforced

Waving all other arguments that might be adduced, we shall confine our attention to those specified in the text. There are two considerations urged as inducements to the performance of this duty

1. The danger of neglecting it

[Men are apt to think themselves sole proprietors of what they have—But, in fact, they are only God's stewards—The poor have, from God's command, a *claim* upon us—And when their distresses are not relieved, he will hear their complaints—He expressly warns us that, “*when they cry to him, it shall be sin to us*”—Our guilt contracted by want of liberality, shall surely be visited upon our own heads; it shall bring upon us the execration of our fellow-creatures,^k a dereliction from our God,^l yea, an everlasting dismission from his presence and glory^m—Who that reflects a moment on these consequences, will not “*beware*” of indulging a disposition that must infallibly entail them upon him?—]

2. The reward of practising it

[Heaven cannot be purchased by almsgiving: and to think it could, would be a most fatal delusion—Nevertheless, God has annexed a blessing to the performance of this duty; “*For this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest*”—Supposing our motives and principles be such as the gospel requires, and our alms be really the fruits of faith and love, the scriptures assure us that they shall be followed with blessings temporalⁿ—spiritual^o—eternal^p—Yea, God, speaking after the manner of men, condescends to say, that we make him our debtor, and to promise that he will repay us the full amount of whatever we give to others for his sake^q—What greater encouragement can we have than such assurances as these?—]

APPLICATION

[The occasion on which we now solicit your alms, is urgent; the objects of distress are many—the season inclement—

ⁱ 2 Cor. ix. 7.

^k Prov. xxviii. 27.

^l Prov. xxi. 13.

^m Matt. xxv. 41—43. “*For*.”

ⁿ Luke vi. 35. last part and Prov. iii. 9, 10.

^o Isaiah lviii. 7, 10, 11.

^p Luke xvi. 9. and xiv. 14. and

¹ Tim. vi. 19. and Matt. xxv. 34, 35. “*For*.”

^q Prov. xix. 17. and 2 Cor. ix. 6.

work scarce—wants numerous—provisions high—and few to administer relief—

Consider then the urgency of the call—the danger of non-compliance—the blessings promised—and especially, the great account—*Guard against a grudging spirit*—And act towards the poor at this time, as you, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards you—]

CCCCLV. THE EXTENT OF A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Phil. iv. 8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

THE scope and tendency of Christianity is to ennable the mind of man, and to restore him to his primitive dignity. If we could frame to ourselves a just idea of what Adam was, when he came out of his Maker's hands, we should see exactly the spirit and conduct to which we are to be reduced by the gospel. The doctrines of our holy religion, excellent as they are, are of no value any further than they produce this blessed effect. They point out the way in which this change is to be wrought, and supply the only motives that can operate upon us with sufficient weight. In this view they are invariably proposed by the inspired writers, who, having stated them in their epistles, always call our attention to the practical improvement of them.

In the exhortation before us we may notice

I. The extent of a Christian's duty

We are at no loss to arrange the particular duties that are here enjoined, since the apostle himself distributes them into two classes:

1. Things “ virtuous”

[Among these “*truth*” is the first in nature and importance; since, without it, all the bands of society would be dissolved: there would be no such thing as confidence between man and man. Of such consequence is this esteemed in the

world, that no virtues, however eminent, can supply the want of it, or render a man respectable, that is regardless of it. And so necessary is it in the eyes of God, that he will banish from him with abhorrence all who wilfully violate its dictates,^a and admit those only to his presence whose adherence to it is strict and uniform.^b This therefore is in the first place to be rigidly adhered to, especially by those who are members of Christ's mystical body.^c It is not indeed necessary, nor would it be proper, on every occasion, to declare all we know: but we must on no account affirm, or insinuate, what is contrary to truth, whether to set off or exculpate ourselves, or to criminate or exalt another. Every species and degree of falsehood should be scrupulously avoided; and every word we utter should bear the stamp of simplicity and godly sincerity.

Next to this, and inseparably connected with it, is "*justice*." A Christian is to know but one rule of conduct: he is, in all his intercourse with men, ~~to~~ do as he would be done unto; that is, to act towards others, as he, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards him. To be guilty of fraud in a way of traffic, or in withholding just debts, or in evading taxes, or putting off base coin, or in any other way whatever, is as inconsistent with the Christian character as adultery or murder. Whatever specious pretexts an ungodly world have invented for the justifying of fraud, no one of us approves of it when it is exercised towards himself; nor will God ever approve of it, however men may extenuate or excuse it: his word to every one of us is, "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live."^d And "he knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."^e

Besides these virtues which have respect to our words and actions, there is one that extends to our very thoughts, and that is no less necessary to be cultivated by us than either of the foregoing, namely, "*purity*." None are so ignorant as not to know, that they ought to restrain their passions, and have them in subjection. But it is not sufficient for a Christian to refrain from open acts of uncleanness; he must learn to mortify his inward desires: he is to "keep his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lusts of concupiscence, like those who know not God."^f He is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and is therefore bound to harbour no thought that may defile that temple, no desire that may grieve his divine inhabitant.^g In all his words, and looks, and thoughts, he

^a Prov. vi. 16, 17. Rev. xxi. 8. and xxii. 15.

^b Ps. xv. 2.

^c Eph. iv. 25.

^d Deut. xvi. 20.

^e 2 Pet. ii. 9.

^f 1 Thess. iv. 4, 5.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. and vi. 19.

should "be pure as God is pure, and holy as God is holy."^b]

2. Things " laudable"

[The fore-mentioned duties are so essential to the Christian character, that any considerable and habitual violation of them is utterly inconsistent with it. There are other duties equally necessary to be observed, but which, from the weakness of our nature, and the imperfection of our attainments, admit of greater deviations without impeaching our sincerity before God.

Amongst these, the things which are "*honest*," that is, grave, venerable, decorous, first demand our attention. A Christian should consider what becomes his age and station as a man, and his character as a disciple of Christ. It is disgusting, when people professing godliness, whether men or women, are vying with an ungodly world in dress, and shew, and vain parade; in a levity of conduct; in a fondness for vain amusements. There is a gravity that befits the "*man of God*," who has engaged to walk in his Redeemer's steps. Not that he need to banish mirth, if it be innocent in its nature, and moderate in its degree: nor need the person of opulence to accommodate himself to the habits of a peasant in his style of living: but there is a moderation that he should carefully observe, a limit suited to his character, a bound which he should in no wise transgress.ⁱ

Whatever things are "*lovely*," are also highly deserving the Christian's regard. There is a courtesy, a meekness, a gentleness, an affability, a modesty, in a word, an urbanity of manners, which is exceeding amiable, and which conciliates the esteem of all who behold it: *this*, in opposition to rudeness, and an inattention to the feelings of others, should be cultivated by all. A readiness also to sympathize with others in their distress, and to condescend to the meanest offices for their comfort and relief, and a delight in performing all the offices of love, how lovely does this appear, how worthy the pursuit of all that would honour God! To this also may be added a candour in judging, a patience in enduring, a tenderness in forgiving, a liberality in bestowing; an assemblage of such graces as these is the brightest ornament of a child of God; and, as we all admire them when exemplified in others, we should make it our daily study to illustrate them in our own conduct.

Further still, there are many things that are "*of good report*," in which also it should be our ambition to excel. A noble disinterestedness of mind, that rises superior to all selfish

^b 1 John iii. 3. and 1 Pet. i. 14—16.

ⁱ Compare Eph. v. 4. 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. 1 Pet. iii. 2—4..

considerations, and consults the public good, is an attainment which the heathens themselves accounted most truly honourable. With this we may rank a nobleness in the ends which we seek to accomplish, a wisdom in the means whereby we labour to effect our purpose, a discretion in the manner of employing those means, a due consideration of all circumstances of time or place, a willingness to yield in things indifferent, and a firmness in maintaining what we consider of importance; a happy combination of these will not fail to exalt a character in the eyes of men, and to procure us respect from those who know how to appreciate such rare talents. *These* therefore, with whatever else insures to men a reputation for magnanimity, or goodness of heart, (provided it be good and proper in itself) we should pursue with ardor, and practise with constancy.]

Passing over many other excellencies, such as diligence, contentment, friendship, gratitude, with numberless others to which the Christian's duty extends, let us proceed to notice

II. The importance of it

The manner in which the Apostle inculcates these things, very strongly marks his sense, at least, of their importance. His distinct enumeration of so many things, his comprehending of them all a second time under the extensive description of things virtuous and laudable; and lastly, the energetic manner in which he recommends them to our attention and regard, all prove, that he was extremely solicitous to impress our minds with a sense of our duty, and to secure to his exhortation the attention it deserves.

Let us then consider how important the observance of our duty in these respects is,

1. To ourselves

[We have no better test of our sincerity before God than this. Our having embraced new tenets, however just those tenets may be, will not prove that our hearts are right with God: nor will an outward reformation of our conduct suffice to establish our pretensions to conversion: there must be an uniformity and consistency in our endeavours to serve God: there must be no virtues so small, as to seem unworthy of our attention, or so great, as to discourage us in the pursuit of them. We must never think we have attained any thing, as long as there remains any thing we have not attained.]

There is nothing that can more conduce to our present happiness than this. Self-government, next to the immediate enjoyment of the divine presence, is the sublimest source of happiness in this world. Let any thing that comes under the description before mentioned, be considered in all its bearings and effects, and it will be found highly conducive to the comfort of our own minds, and to the happiness of all around us. Abstracted from the consideration of any future recompence, "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."¹

Moreover it tends to increase in our souls a meetness for heaven. By virtuous actions we attain virtuous habits; and by virtuous habits a conformity to God's image: and our conformity to God in holiness is that which alone constitutes our meetness for glory. Should we not therefore be endeavouring daily to get every lineament of the divine image engraven on our souls? Should not the hope of growing up into Christ's likeness be an incentive to continual and increased exertions in the way of duty? Need we, or can we have, any greater stimulus than this?]

2. To the church

[By this alone can we silence the objections of her adversaries. In every age the adversaries have vented their calumnies against the church, as though all her members were hypocrites, and their seeming piety were a cloke for some hidden abominations. They have also represented her doctrines as visionary and enthusiastic, yea, as calculated to subvert the foundations of morality, and to open the floodgates of licentiousness. But when they see an holy and consistent conduct, the joint effect of piety and wisdom, they are constrained to shut their mouths, and to confess that God is with us of a truth.^m

By this also do all her members contribute greatly to their mutual edification and endearment. It is with Christ's mystical body as it is with our natural bodies: when every member performs its proper office, and supplies its proper nutriment, all the parts are kept in activity and vigour, and the whole is confirmed and strengthened.ⁿ Let any of the graces before mentioned be neglected, and disunion will proportionably ensue. Moreover, those members that are most defective in their duty, will discover a consequent languor and decay. Whereas, the members that are indefatigable in the exercise of these graces, will "make their profiting to appear," and be enabled

¹ Isaiah xxxii. 17.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 12, 15. and iii. 16.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 29.

to withstand the assaults of all their enemies.^o The former will be a source of trouble and disquietude to the church; the latter, of harmony and peace.]

3. To the world around us

[*There is nothing else so likely to fix conviction on the minds of sinners.* The ungodly world will not learn religion from the Bible; nor will listen to it as enforced in the discourses of God's faithful ministers. But they cannot shut their eyes against the light of an holy life. St. Paul's epistles are known and read of few: but godly men are "the epistles of Christ, known and read of all men:"^p and many who would not regard the written word, have been won by their godly conversation.^q

On the other hand, *there is nothing that hardens sinners so much as an inconsistent conduct in the professors of religion.* If a saint fall through temptation, or an hypocrite discover his hypocrisy; instantly the world cry out, "There, there, so would we have it."^r Nor are they satisfied with condemning the individual offenders; they immediately reflect on the whole body of Christians, as hypocrites alike; yea, and blaspheme that adorable Saviour whose religion they profess.^s Thus do they confirm their prejudices against the truth, and justify themselves in their rejection of the gospel. If then the rescuing of our fellow-creatures from perdition, or the contributing to involve them in it, be so connected with our conduct, of what importance must it be so to demean ourselves, that we may adorn our holy profession, and recommend the gospel to their favourable acceptance!]

APPLICATION

[*"Think then upon these things."* Think of their nature, that you may be apprised of their extent: think of their obligation, that you may be aware of their importance: think of their difficulty, that you may obtain help from your God: think of their excellency, that you may be stirred up to abound in them: and think of their complicated effects on the world around you, that you may make your light to shine before men, and that others, beholding it, may glorify your Father that is in heaven.^t]

^o 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

^p 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

^q 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2.

^r Ps. xxxv. 19, 25.

^s 2 Pet. ii. 2. Rom. ii. 24. 1 Tim. vi. 1.

^t Matt. v. 16.

CCCCLVI. THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION.

1 Thess. v. 16—18. *Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

THE just union of personal and relative duties is the brightest ornament of the Christian profession—The discharge of either will be imperfect, if it be not united with an attention to the other—As beauty in the human body consists not in the exquisite formation of any single feature, but in the just symmetry and configuration of the whole frame, so the perfection of a Christian character consists not in an exclusive attention to any one duty, but in a due regard to all duties, civil and religious, social and personal—

St. Paul has been given directions respecting the duties we owe to each other as a Christian society^a—He now descends from the social to the personal duties; stating at the same time both the grounds on which they stand, and the indispensable necessity of attending to them.

Taking his directions in a comprehensive and united view, we learn that religion is

I. A spiritual service

[Many, like the Pharisees of old, suppose it consists in a formal attendance on ordinances, and an external decency of conduct—But true religion is inward and spiritual—It calls forth the strongest energies of the soul—It enables a person to maintain a holy intercourse with God in secret—St. Paul himself describes it as consisting, not in outward ceremonies of any kind, but in a devotedness of heart and soul to God^b—And declares that no man can be a Christian indeed, who does not possess and manifest this elevated state of mind^c—How earnestly then should we examine whether we be thus continually waiting upon God in the exercise of prayer and praise!—]

II. A rational service

[Spiritual religion is too often deemed enthusiasm—Indeed, if we interpreted the text literally and in the strictest

^a Ver. 14.

^b Rom. xiv. 17.

^c Phil. iii. 3. and Rom. ii. 28, 29.

sense of the words, we should make religion impracticable and absurd—But, when properly explained, it enjoins nothing but what is highly reasonable—It requires us to live in the stated and devout exercise of public, social, and private prayer; and to maintain such a sense of our own unworthiness, as excites a lively gratitude for every mercy we enjoy, and stimulates to an unwearyed admiration of the divine goodness—And can any thing be more reasonable than such a state?—Should not they, whose iniquities are so great, and whose wants so numerous, be frequently employed in imploring mercy and grace in the time of need?—And they, who are daily loaded with benefits, be daily blessing and adoring their benefactor?—Such a service is expressly called a “*reasonable service*”^d—To do otherwise were surely most unreasonable—Nor are any people more irrational than they who pour contempt on these holy exercises from an affected regard for *rational religion*—]

III. A delightful service

[Many are prejudiced against spiritual religion as though it must of necessity deprive them of all the comforts of life—Certain it is that it will rob them of all the pleasures of sin—But it will afford them infinitely richer pleasures in its stead—What can be more delightful than to maintain “fellowship with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ?”—Can there be any melancholy arising from incessant praises and thanksgivings?—Were the first converts, or the Samaritans, or the jailor rendered melancholy by the acquisition of religion?^f—Many are made melancholy by false views of religion; but none are by just and scriptural apprehensions of it—In proportion as we live in the exercise of it, we resemble the glorified saints and angels—]

Such being the nature of true religion, we will endeavour to enforce the practice of it

[The will of God should be the law of all his creatures—And his will respecting us is fully revealed—*It is his earnest desire* that we should live in the enjoyment of himself—“He willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live”—*It is moreover his authoritative command* that we should love and serve him—It is his command to all, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned—None are so high as to be exempt from this duty, nor any so situated as to be incapable of performing it—The heart may

^d Rom. xii. 1.

^e Prov. iii. 17. This is not true of *formal*, but only of *inward and spiritual*, religion.

^f Acts ii. 46. and viii. 8. and xvi. 34.

be lifted up in prayer and praise even when we are occupied in the service of the world—Let all then know God's will respecting them—We must delight ourselves in communion with God—O let us be like-minded with our heavenly Father!—Let us say, This shall be my will also—From henceforth let us “watch unto prayer and thanksgiving with all perseverance”—Let us be ashamed that we have so long resisted the divine will—And let us so live in obedience to it on earth, that we may have our portion with those who are praising him incessantly in heaven—]

CCCCLVII. FAITHFULNESS REWARDED.

Rev. ii. 10. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

WE might reasonably hope that a strict conformity to our Maker's will should render us lovely in the eyes of our fellow-creatures: but experience proves, that there is no surer way of provoking the displeasure of men than by rigidly obeying the commands of God—The omniscient Jehovah testified respecting the church of Smyrna, that, though poor in their own estimation, they were “rich” in his: yet he apprised them that their piety, so far from exempting them from trials, would provoke the malice of Satan, and ere long bring them into great tribulation: nevertheless the difficulties which they were to encounter were no just grounds of fear, since their faithfulness should be recompensed with a rich reward—To illustrate the promise before us we shall set forth

I. The faithfulness required of a Christian

The expression “faithful unto death” evidently implies that our faithfulness must be

1. Laborious

[As servants of the Most High we all have work to do, and work that calls for the exertion of all our powers—Now we know that amongst men a servant who neglects his duty is deemed unfaithful, though he never should embezzle his master's goods—So will God esteem those wicked, who are slothful and unprofitable; and will at last number them with hypo-

crites and unbelievers^a—To approve ourselves to him we must “ stedfastly abound in the work of the Lord”—]

2. Patient

[We are taught to expect trials in the way of duty—But are we to be discouraged by them? Are we not rather to take up the cross, when it lies fairly in our way; and to “ rejoice that we are counted worthy” to bear it?^b—Would a soldier be deemed faithful, who should turn his back as soon as he was called to encounter an enemy?—So neither can we if we will not expose, and even sacrifice, our lives in our Master’s cause—His own declaration is, “ He that saveth his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall save it”^c]—

3. Persevering

[We are not only to go with our life in our hand on one or two particular occasions, but to hold on, till God himself shall give us a discharge from our warfare—Death alone must terminate our fidelity—Many years of service would avail us nothing, if we drew back at last—We must “ endure to the end, if ever we would be saved”^d]—

To such faithfulness we shall surely aspire, if we consider

II. The reward promised to it

God will most undoubtedly reward his faithful servants

[Some are so attached to systems, that they can scarcely endure the mention of rewards, lest with them we should associate the idea of human *merit*: but there are “ rewards of grace as well as of debt,”^e and to those the most eminent of God’s servants have looked forward as the recompense of their labours^f—Nor is God only “ a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” but he will invariably proportion his rewards to their labours^g]—

The recompense he will bestow will far overbalance all that we can do or suffer for him

[“ A crown” is the highest of earthly dignities, and implies every thing which can gratify a carnal mind—But it is a crown “ of life” that God has promised; not a temporary, fading diadem, but “ glory, and honour, and immortality”—As in comparison of this all earthly dignities are lighter than vanity, so all the exertions we can use, or the sufferings we can bear, are unworthy of the smallest mention—This is the testimony of

^a Matt. xxv. 26, 30.

^b Luke xiv. 26, 27. Acts v. 41.

^c Matt. x. 39.

^d Matt. xxiv. 13.

^e Rom. iv. 4.

^f Heb. xi. 26.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 5. Luke xix. 16—19.

an inspired apostle;^h nor shall our most enlarged expectations ever be disappointed—]

INFER

1. What scope is here for the ambition of men!

[The men of this world will labour incessantly for the attainment of earthly honours and emoluments, which, after all, prove empty and unsatisfying: the pursuit of those things is almost universally carried to excess—But this promise should stimulate us to a nobler ambition—We should not be contented with any thing which this world can afford; but aspire after heaven itself, nor be satisfied with any thing less than a crown of righteousness and glory—O that there were in all of us such a mind;ⁱ and that we might never relax our diligence till we had attained the summit of our ambition!—]

2 What encouragement have we to be faithful in the service of our God!

[The service of sin and Satan is but poorly recompensed—What if we enjoy a momentary pleasure? what if we could gain the whole world? how infinitely would this fall short of the rewards which God has prepared for us!—Even in the work of righteousness there is peace; and in keeping of God's commandments there is great reward:^k but what we shall possess when we have fulfilled his will, no tongue can tell, no heart can conceive—Let us then boldly serve our God without fearing the sufferings we may be called to endure—Let us “not count our lives dear, so that we may but finish our course with joy”—Let us “be willing not only to be bound but even to die for the Lord Jesus;” expecting assuredly, that, whatever we lose for him, we shall have returned to us an hundred-fold even in this present life; and, in the world to come, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^l—]

^h Rom. viii. 18.

^k Isaiah xxxii. 17. Ps. xix. 11.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 9. φιλοτιμοθεα.

^l Mark x. 29, 30.

CCCCLVIII. A RIGHT IMPROVEMENT OF ELECTING LOVE.

Deut. vii. 6—10. *Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people*

(for ye were the fewest of all people) but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keepeth his commandments, to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him, to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.

THERE is in man a strange reluctance to contemplate the sovereignty of God: but, if duly improved, there is no subject more comforting to the soul, or more calculated to promote practical religion. It is this on which Moses insists, in order to deter the Israelites from connexions with the heathen, and to induce them to maintain inviolable the commandments of their God.

With similar views we would draw your attention to
I. The privilege of God's people

The Jews were “a special people unto the Lord their God”

[They had been redeemed from a most oppressive bondage, instructed by the voice of revelation, supported by bread from heaven, brought into the nearest relation to the Deity, and honoured with access to him in ordinances of divine appointment. In these, and many other respects, they were distinguished above all other people upon earth.^a]

Such is also the privilege of all true believers

[They have been rescued from the tyranny of sin and Satan,^b taught by the word and Spirit of God,^c furnished with daily supplies of grace,^d made sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,^e and admitted into the most intimate communion with their God.^f Nor were the Jews so much exalted above the heathen world, as true believers are above all others, even the professed followers of Christ.^g]

It will be no unprofitable subject of meditation, if we enquire into

^a Deut. iv. 7, 8. and xxxiii. 29.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^c John vi. 45.

^d John i. 16.

^e 2 Cor. vi. 18.

^f 1 John i. 3.

^g Mark iii. 34, 35. Matt. xix. 28.

II. The source of that privilege

The Jews owed all their blessings to the distinguishing grace of God

[They were not chosen for their numbers, or for their goodness; for "they were the fewest" and most stiff-necked "of all people." God's love to them had its origin within his own bosom; "he loved them because he would love them;" and in due season he testified that love to them, because he had voluntarily engaged to do so.]

Nor can our blessings be traced to any other source

[God, in choosing us to salvation, has not respect to any goodness in us, whether past, present, or future; not to *past*; for all of us, not excepting even the apostles themselves, have been inconceivably vile:^h not to *present*; for many of us, like Paul and the three thousand, were in the very midst of our sinful career, when God plucked us as brands from the burning:ⁱ not *future*; for we never should have had any thing good in us, if it had not been given us of God;^k and it is evident that the grace he has given us, can never be the ground and reason of his bestowing that grace upon us. He has "chosen us that we *might be* holy;" but not because we were so, or because he foresaw we should become so.^l No reason can be assigned for his choosing us rather than others, except that assigned by our Lord himself, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."^m Nor has he kept us *on account of* our own stability (for we are all bent to backslide from himⁿ) but on account of the covenant he has made with us in Christ,^p wherein he has engaged to preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom. In the whole of his conduct towards us he has acted according to "his eternal purpose and grace."^r]

That we may not abuse so great a privilege, let us consider

III. The improvement to be made of it

We should attentively consider the character of God, who is

1. Sovereign in the exercise of his mercy

[His grace is his own, and he may dispose of it as he will.^t If he had consigned us all over to perdition as he did the fallen

^h Tit. iii. 3. Eph. ii. 3.

ⁱ Acts ii. 23. and ix. 1.

^k 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^l Eph. i. 4. John xv. 16.

^m Matt. xi. 26.

ⁿ Hos. xi. 7.

^o Ps. lxxxix. 29—35.

^p Rom. xi. 5. 2 Tim. i. 9.

^q Matt. xx. 15.

angels, he had been just. We therefore can have no claim upon him for any share in his mercy. Whether he make us vessels of honour or of dishonour, we have no more ground of pride or murmuring, than the clay has, which is fashioned according to the potter's will.^r Whether we will receive it or not, he is a Sovereign, that dispenses mercy according to his own will;^s and, if there be any difference between one and another, that difference results, not from any power or goodness in us, but from God's free and sovereign grace.^t

2. Faithful in the observance of his promises

[They who have really an interest in the promises, are universally distinguished by this mark, "They love God, and keep his commandments." To these God will most assuredly approve himself "faithful." His "covenant" is ordered in all things, and he will inviolably "keep" it. What Joshua said to the whole Jewish nation, may be yet more extensively applied to all true believers, "No promise ever has failed them, or ever shall."^u]

3. Terrible in the execution of his threatenings

[Those who do not love him, and keep his commandments, he considers as "hating him;" and he will surely "repay them to their face." Their proud rebellious conduct shall be recompensed on their own heads.^x And, though now they seem as if they defied his Majesty, they shall find to their cost that his patience has an end, and that, however merciful he is, he will by no means clear the guilty—]

Having fully considered this character of God, we should have a deep and an abiding persuasion of it wrought in our hearts.

We should know it

1. For the quickening of our diligence

[Nothing will ever more strongly operate on our souls than the consideration of our obligations to God as the sovereign author of all our good desires, and the faithful preserver of them in our souls. This is the very improvement which Moses himself makes of the truths contained in the text:^z and an inspired apostle declares, that the dedication of ourselves to God is the very end, for which God himself has distinguished us by his sovereign grace.^a Let us then be ever saying, What shall I render unto the Lord? and let us devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit.]

^r Rom. ix. 18—21.

^s Eph. i. 11.

^t Rom. ix. 16, 18.

^u Josh. xxiii. 14.

^x Deut. xxxii. 35. and xxix. 20. and Ezek. xxiv. 14.

^y Exod. xxxiv. 7.

^z Ver. 11.

^a 1 Pet. ii. 9.

2. For the quieting of our fears

[The two principal sources of disquietude to the soul are, a sense of our unworthiness to receive God's mercies, and of our insufficiency to do his will. Now both of these are entirely removed by a view of God's character as exhibited in the text. As he is a sovereign, he may bestow his grace, as he often has done, on the most unworthy; he is most glorified by bestowing it on these very persons. And, as he is faithful, he may be safely trusted to accomplish his own promises, in his own time and way. Our weakness is no obstacle to him: it shall rather be an occasion of manifesting the perfection of his strength. Let us then commit ourselves into his hands; and every perfection he possesses shall be glorified in our salvation.]

CCCCLIX. GOD THE ONLY SOURCE OF ALL GOOD.

James i. 16, 17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*

MAN is prone to extenuate his own guilt; and to transfer blame to second causes, or even to the first great cause of all, rather than take it entirely to himself—

And it is probable that St. James had noticed, among the Christians of his day, a tendency to this disposition—

He therefore cautioned them against imagining that God was accessory to their sins—

And assured them that nothing but good proceeded from him—

From his words we may notice that God is

I. The *only* source of all good

Every good thing in *the creation* was the work of his hands—

Our mental faculties, no less than our bodily powers, are his gift—

Our daily supplies of *providential blessings* also must be traced to him—

But the text more immediately refers to spiritual blessings

[Every good desire is the gift of God's Spirit^a—

All power to execute it must also be traced to the same source^b—

Above all, CHRIST is the great gift of God to mankind^c—

Heaven also is a gift, which will consummate and complete all that have preceded it^d—

And these are properly called “good and perfect;” because they are *good* in themselves, and tend to the *perfecting* both of our nature and our happiness—]

These all proceed from God as “the Father of lights”

[The sun may be called the father of lights in reference to the works of creation—

The moon and stars shine only by reflecting *his* light—

Whatever therefore, either of light or heat, our world enjoys, it must be traced to that great luminary as its proper source—

Thus in all the blessings we either have or hope for, God alone must be acknowledged as the author and giver of them—

He makes indeed our fellow-creatures useful to us as second causes—

But, whether mediately or immediately, all we receive is from him, the only fountain of all good—]

Moreover, to those who rely upon him, he is

II. The *immutable* source of all good

Immutability is essential to his very nature

[If he were to change, it must be for the better or the worse—

In either case he could not be God, since he either was not before, or would cease to be perfect—

Hence he is said to be “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever”^e—]

^a 1 Chron. xxix. 14. and 2 Cor. viii. 16. and 2 Cor. ix. 15. with all the preceding context.

^b Phil. ii. 13. To this effect is that collect in our liturgy; “O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed,” &c.

^c John iii. 16. and iv. 10.

^d It is called “the *grace*” that shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. i. 13.

^e Heb. xiii. 8.

This attribute is peculiarly manifest in the continuance of his mercy towards his peculiar people

[The sun is the best emblem of unchangeableness amongst all the works of creation—

It is incessantly imparting benefits to this, and perhaps to many other worlds—

Yet it has its changes both annual and daily—

And, in its seasons of withdrawal, abandons the earth to its own darkness and barrenness—

It is far otherwise with God, who “never leaves nor forsakes his people”^f—

He is always stationary in his meridian height^g—

Sometimes indeed he suffers his rays to be intercepted by clouds^h—

But in those seasons he consults only his people’s good—

He makes them sensible of their dependence upon him—

And endears to them the returning “light of his countenance”—]

APPLICATION—“Do not err, my beloved brethren;”

1. In self-vindication

[You cannot but know, how prone you are, like your first parents,ⁱ to shift off from yourselves the blame that deservedly attaches to you—

But, in so doing, you, however ignorantly, condemn him who suffered the temptation to assault you—

If there were not in your own hearts a love to sin, neither men nor devils could force you to commit it—

Know then that in every sin you have ever committed, you have been “drawn away and enticed, not by God, but by your own lusts”—

And if you perish for ever, you will have none but yourselves to blame^k—]

2. In self-applause

[You are as ready to take to yourselves the honour of what is good, as to exculpate yourselves in what is evil—

But as well might the earth boast of its fruitfulness independent of the sun, as you arrogate to yourselves the glory of any good that you perform—

To see what the earth in itself is, view it as it exists in the depth of a winter’s night—

Precisely such would you be, if the influences of God’s Spirit were withdrawn from you^l—

^f Heb. xiii. 5.

^g Mal. iii. 6.

^h Isaiah xlvi. 15.

ⁱ Gen. iii. 12, 13.

^k Ver. 13—15.

^l 1 Cor. iv. 7.

Learn then to give God the glory of every good action, word, or thought^m—

Yea, if you be eminent, even as St. Paul himself, you must say, “ Not I, but the grace that was with me”ⁿ] —

^m 2 Cor. iii. 5. and v. 5.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

CCCCLX. OF SEEKING THE LORD IN TIME.

*Isaiah iv. 6. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.**

THERE is scarcely any more striking proof of our insensibility with respect to eternal things, than the unconcern we shew whilst death is casting his darts all around us. If our neighbour's house were on fire, we should think of exerting ourselves to secure our own habitation from the flames, or to save our property: yet we can hear of the deaths of others, and confess that we ourselves also are dying creatures, and yet delay our preparation for death as much as if we were exempt from the common danger. But every fresh instance of mortality is a voice from God to the survivors; and speaks to them the very language of the text.

We need not give a formal distribution of the text, as it is our intention only to ground upon it a general exhortation to seek the Lord. Yet, that our plan may not be altogether concealed, we shall arrange our thoughts under the following observations

I. There is reason to fear that God is absent from the most of us

[It is not improbable that some amongst us may live in the occasional, if not also the habitual, commission of known and open sin. In some will be found drunkenness and lewdness: in others, falsehood and dishonesty: in some, pride and envy; in others, malice and revenge. And are not these manifest tokens that they are strangers to the divine presence?

* There is a beautiful plan of a Sermon on this text in Claude's Essay, page 18, second edition.

But where the external deportment is blameless, and the form of godliness is maintained, how little is there, for the most part, of its power! Many read the Bible, and find it a sealed book: they attend the ordinances of religion, but experience no delight in them: they pray in secret (if mere formal devotions can be called prayer) and derive no benefit to their souls. Whence is all this, but because God is absent from them? If God were with them, his “words would be spirit and life” unto them;^a their communion with him would be sweet; their communications from him would diffuse a glory round their very countenance;^b and the exercises of religion, though not always alike spiritual, would on the whole be accompanied with vital energy, and be followed with progressive sanctification.

Such, alas! is the state of the generality: however they may have seen the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, and have felt some alarm and terror in their souls, they are yet strangers to that still small voice in which the Lord reveals himself to his people.^c We may say, in reference to what was spoken on a very different occasion, Lord, if thou hadst been with them, they had not been thus habitually dead and formal.^{d]}

II. We cannot hope to find him, if we do not seek him

[We know that, in the ordinary course of providence, neither the countryman can fill his barns without much previous toil, nor the student acquire knowledge without much patient investigation. How then can it be supposed that we should attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God without seeking after him in his appointed way? He has indeed sometimes been found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that enquired not after him:^e but this must no more be expected by us, than that the sea should open a passage for our feet, or the sun stand still to lengthen out our day. God has said he will be enquired of by us,^f and that we must ask, if we would have; and seek, if we would find.^g Nor is it in a cold indifferent manner that we must seek; we must strive as persons in earnest,^h and if once we get access to God, we must detain him, as it were, by force,ⁱ and take his kingdom, as it were, by violence.^k And it is for want of this holy zeal in our endeavours, that so many of us seek him throughout our lives, and never obtain a saving “acquaintance with him.” We must also seek him *in and through*

^a John vi. 63.

^b Exod. xxxiv. 35.

^c 1 Kings xix. 11—13.

^d John xi. 21, 32.

^e Rom. x. 20.

^f Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^g Luke xi. 9.

^h Luke xiii. 24.

ⁱ Gen. xxxii. 26.

^k Matt. xi. 12.

Christ: for it is by Christ only that we can ever come unto the Father.^{1]}

III. There is a time coming, when, though we should seek him, he will not be found of us

[This awful truth is strongly intimated in the text; nor ought it to be concealed from our view. We all know that, at the time of death, our opportunities of seeking God will be for ever closed.^m However earnestly we may implore the divine favour,ⁿ or even the smallest expression of it,^o we shall ask in vain. But our day of grace may also be terminated on this side the grave. The Jews in the wilderness,^p and those who rejected our Lord's word,^q and the greatest part of the Jewish nation at the time of his death,^r were given over to final impenitence, even while they continued in the full enjoyment of health, and of all outward privileges. And we have reason to fear the same dreadful judgments, if we persist in slighting God's warnings, and in deferring our repentance.^s How earnestly should we improve the present hour, if we duly considered this!]

IV. If we would seek him now, he would be found of all of us

[This is the accepted time; this is the day of salvation.^t God "is near" to us at present, both in his word and ordinances, and he is willing to be found of every sincere worshipper. If indeed we have determinately set ourselves against him, and resisted all the motions of his Spirit, till he has ceased to strive with us, it is possible that we may be already given up to final obduracy.^u But if we feel any desire after God, then we may be sure that he has not yet cast us off: that very desire is, if we may so speak, a knock at the door of our hearts, whereby God intimates his willingness to take up his abode with us.^x Only let us cherish the latent spark; and we may be assured that he will not quench the smoking flax;^y he will not despise the day of small things.^z]

We will not conclude this address without a more particular APPLICATION of it to different persons

1. To the young

[To you God has given an express promise that you shall

¹ John xiv. 6.

^m Eccl. ix. 10.

ⁿ John ix. 4. Matt. xxv. 11, 12. and vii. 22, 23.

^o Luke xvi. 24, 26. ^p Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12. and xcii. 11.

^q John viii. 21.

^r Luke xix. 42.

^s Prov. i. 24—31.

^t 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^u Gen. vi. 3.

^x Rev. iii. 20.

^v Matt. xii. 20.

^z Zech. iv. 10.

not seek his face in vain.^a Seek then to resemble those whose names are recorded for your encouragement, as having obtained mercy in their earliest years,^b and as being highly distinguished among the saints of God. And let not these years, which are so favourable for the reception of divine impressions,^c be wasted in the service of sin and Satan.]

2 To the afflicted

[Affliction is oftentimes the voice of God:^d and, if you have the wisdom to improve it, you also have a special promise, that you shall find favour with God.^e Begin then "in the day of adversity to consider;" and you shall have no reason to regret the severity of the means, when once you have attained the end which God designs to accomplish by them.]

3 To the old

[You above all should set yourselves to seek the Lord, because your day of grace cannot be continued much longer. It is a comfort, however, to reflect, that you may obtain mercy even at the eleventh hour.^f Let then your past time be redeemed with diligence; and, the shorter the space allowed you is for seeking the Lord, the more earnest let your exertions be to "know the things belonging to your peace, before they be for ever hid from your eyes."*]

^a Prov. viii. 17.

^b Samuel, Josiah, and Timothy, from their very childhood, and John Baptist from the womb.

^c Prov. xxii. 6.

^d Mic. vi. 9.

^e Ps. i. 15.

^f Matt. xx. 5, 6.

* If this were the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, the friends of the deceased might be addressed, and the deceased person's past and present views of this subject be impressed upon their minds as incentives to diligence.

CCCCLXI. THE NECESSITY OF HOLY FEAR.

1 Pet. i. 17. *If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

CHRISTIAN'S possess many privileges by means of their relation to God; yet it is not their privileges, but their practical improvement of them, that will determine their state in the eternal world—They are called to be ho-

ly after the example of their God; and they must be conformed to his image, if they would be partakers of his glory—There will be no more partiality shewn to them than to others in the day of judgment—God will determine the fate of all by their actions; and the condition for which they are meet, shall be the condition allotted them to all eternity—St. Peter inculcating the need of holy fear, insists upon it particularly as conducing to fit us for that strict account to which we shall all be very shortly called—In discoursing on his words we shall shew

I. The impartiality of the future judgment

The children of God maintain communion with God as their Father in Christ

[The Apostle speaks of Christians as “obedient children;” and as calling upon the Father for a supply of their daily wants—This is the privilege of all true Christians; “a spirit of Adoption is given them, that they may cry, Abba, Father;” and, because they are children, they may expect to receive all the glory of heaven as their inheritance———]

Nevertheless they will experience no partiality in the day of judgment

[Among men it is but too common for parents to feel an undue bias in concerns relating to their children—But God has established one mode of procedure for all—His written law is the standard to which every thing shall be referred—The principles from which our actions flowed, the manner in which they were performed, and the end for which they were done, will be minutely investigated, and a sentence passed upon us according to their real quality—There will be no difference in this respect between Jew or Gentile, rich or poor; nor will any regard be shewn to men’s professions: it will be to no purpose to plead “that they had Abraham to their Father,” or that they had “cast out devils in the name of Christ;” the one enquiry will be, Were ye holy? And according as this appears, their state will be for ever fixed—]

Interested as we are in the event of that day, let us enquire into

II. The influence which this consideration should have upon us

God requires us to pass our short span of life in fear

[We are “sojourners in this world, as all our fathers were”—It is but a short time that any of us have to live, and

then we shall be removed to our long home—The present state is a state of probation, a moment allotted us to prepare for eternity—Under such circumstances we should be “working out our salvation with fear and trembling”—Not that we should indulge a servile dread of God as an hard master, and a vindictive judge, but an holy reverential fear of offending him, and a tender concern to please him in all things—This is “the fear in which we should walk all the day long”]

Nor can any thing tend more to produce this fear in us than the consideration now before us

[Shall I be judged according to my works? Will every action, word, and thought be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary? Will all my motives be inspected by him, who “searcheth the heart, and weigheth the spirits?” Surely I have need to fear, lest some hidden abomination lurk within me, and lest I should be “speaking peace to my soul when there is no peace”—I need be studious to please him, whose favour or displeasure are of such importance to my soul—If I must stand or fall for eternity, it becomes me to redouble my care—]

We shall further ENFORCE THIS SUBJECT by some suitable advice

1. Be watchful against all occasions of sin

[Our Lord has taught us to “pray lest we enter into temptation;” for in temptation how rarely we do retain our integrity!—Let not those pretend to fear God, who needlessly expose themselves to the assaults of Satan—If we would “keep our garments pure,” we must be careful where, and with whom we walk—Does the command to “come out from the world” appear severe? it is not severe, but merciful, and necessary—May God enable us carefully to obey it!—]

2. Reflect frequently on the strictness of that scrutiny which we must undergo

[When tempted to sin, let us not ask, What will the world say? but, How will this appear in God’s eyes? How will this affect my eternal state?—Apply this thought to your duties as well as to your temptations; How will this service appear when brought to the touchstone of God’s law?—If this be done, too many of us will have to rank their services among their greatest sins—]

3. Apply continually to the blood of Christ for pardon

[However circumspect we be, our feet will contract some defilement in this polluted world; and “if Christ wash us not, we can have no part with him”—Indeed our very tears need to be washed, and our repents to be repented of; nor is

there any fountain but that of the Redeemer's blood, that can ever cleanse us—There, however, “sins even of a crimson die may be made white as snow”—Let there then be no hour wherein we do not bathe in that fountain, lest sin be found upon us in the day that we give up our account to God—]

Be much in prayer for the direction and assistance of the Holy Spirit

[In vain will be all our fear and caution, if God do not both direct and uphold us: if he leave us for one moment, we fall; “without him we can do nothing”—Let us then be often praying, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe”—Thus shall we escape the snares that are laid for our feet, and “be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom”—]

CCCCLXII. WE MUST NOT SEEK GREAT THINGS.

Jer. xlvi. 5. Seekest thou great things unto thyself? Seek them not.

WORLDLINESS is a great and common evil: and it is often manifested in those from whom we should least expect it. The sons of Zebedee solicited the highest posts of honour in their Master's kingdom, immediately after he had been foretelling his crucifixion: and all the disciples disputed about pre-eminence even at the last supper, just after they had been warned, that one of them would betray his Lord. Thus Baruch, when he had been writing in a book all the prophecies of Jeremiah, wherein God's determination to destroy the Jewish nation had been repeatedly declared, was promising himself years of ease and affluence; and was afraid to write another copy of the prophecies, lest the king, who had destroyed the former copy, should put him to death. Jeremiah therefore was ordered by God to reprove him; to tell him what had been the secret thoughts of his heart,^a and to warn him against indulging such an unbecoming spirit.^b

^a Ver. 3.

^b To see this connexion, read the 36th chap. and then the 45th, which in the series of Jeremiah's prophecies, ought to follow it.

The prohibition in the text being applicable to all in every age, we shall shew .

I. When we may be said to seek great things unto ourselves

In direct reference to the text itself we observe, that this may be said of us

1. When the objects of our pursuit are great

[Things are great or small by comparison only; since that which would be great for a peasant, would be altogether worthless in the eyes of a king. But they may universally be called "great," when they far exceed our present condition: and, in that case, an aspiring after them subjects us to the censure in the text. The world indeed universally commend ambition: but worldly ambition is very opposite to the self-denying doctrines of Christianity. It was always discountenanced by our Lord;^c and is universally reprobated by his apostles:^d and, wherever it rules in the heart, it indicates a carnal, and worldly mind.^e]

2. When we seek even moderate things with eagerness

[There is an important distinction to be made between industry, and eagerness: the one relates to the activity of the body; the other to an excessive desire of the mind: the one is not only proper, but necessary, in our respective spheres;^f the other is universally sinful, when it relates to earthly things. What can our Lord mean by repeating, no less than four times, that solemn injunction, "Take no thought?"^g Doubtless it is not to be taken literally in the strictest sense: but, allowing for the utmost latitude of interpretation, he must mean, that we should take no *anxious* thought even for the most moderate, or most necessary, comforts. In perfect agreement with this are the directions of his apostles:^h consequently, the indulging of an eager desire after any thing pertaining to this life, exposes us to the reproof contained in the text.]

3. When we seek any thing merely for ourselves

[We are not at liberty to make *self* in any instance the chief end of our actions. There is One above us, even God, whose honour we should seek, even in the most common offices of life.ⁱ To be lovers of our own selves is a mark of a

^c Matt. viii. 20. John vi. 15. Matt. vi. 19—21.

^d Phil. iii. 19. Col. iii. 2.

^e Rom. viii. 5.

^f Rom. xii. 11. Eccl. ix. 10.

^g Matt. vi. 25, 28, 31, 34.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 31.

reprobate mind:^k and whatever we do under the influence of such a spirit, whether the action be of a civil^l or religious^m nature, it is not acceptable to God. Though therefore we do not aspire after great things, yet, if we seek any thing merely for ourselves, and without any higher end than our own ease, interest, or honour, we are altogether wrong, and deserving of the severest censure.]

To vindicate the reasonableness of this prohibition, we shall proceed to shew

II. Why we should not seek them

That the reasons may more distinctly appear, we shall shew

1. Why we should not make great things the objects of our pursuit

[An aspiring after riches or honours necessarily supposes that we expect to find happiness in the enjoyment of them. But it is certain that even the whole world (supposing we could possess it) could never make us happy.ⁿ What folly then is it to be seeking to "fill our belly with the east wind!"^o Besides, the more we possess of this world, the more we are exposed to temptations. Who does not see that the having the means of gratifying our evil inclinations operates as an inducement to indulge them? and that an elevation of rank or character has a tendency to strengthen the pride of our hearts? Are there not then temptations enough in our way without our seeking to increase them? Shall we "load ourselves with thick clay"^p when we are about to run a race; or make the way to heaven tenfold more difficult than it is already?^q They to whom God has given great things, may doubtless enjoy them: but the man who seeks them, labours for that which will ultimately involve him in utter ruin.]

2. Why we should not seek even moderate things with eagerness

[No man is eager after any thing but in consequence of the love he feels towards it: his eagerness therefore to it must imply a love of it. Now an attachment to any of the things of time and sense, especially such an attachment as stimulates us earnestly to pursue them, argues a want of true love to

^k 2 Tim. iii. 2.

^l Hos. x. 1.

^m Zech. vii. 5, 6.

ⁿ Luke xii. 15.

^o Job xv. 2.

^p Hab. ii. 6.

^q Matt. xix. 23, 24.

^r 1 Tim. vi. 8, 10. Οὐ δέ βολόμενοι πλαγτεῖν. The willing and desiring to be rich has this fatal tendency, without any determination to get rich at all events.

God;^s for to love both God and Mammon is impossible.^t Moreover such an eagerness shews, that we have no just value for our souls: for if we had once learned to appreciate the soul aright, the whole world would appear as nothing in comparison of it.^u Will any one then justify a conduct that involves in it such consequences? As long as the love of God, and care for our own souls, be our bounden duty, so long must the eager pursuit of an earthly vanity be incompatible with the Christian character.]

3. Why we should not seek any thing merely for ourselves

[We are not our own, but God's. He both formed^x and redeemed^y us, that we might glorify his name: and he represents his faithful servants as seeking, *not their own things*, but the things of Jesus Christ.^z Are we then at liberty to rob God of his glory? and to defeat the great end both of our creation and redemption? Besides, our fellow-creatures also have a claim upon us. We are commanded not to "seek every man his own, but every man another's wealth."^a Ought we then to deprive them of their right? Doubtless we may without impropriety labour in our respective callings to provide for ourselves and families: but we must take care that, in doing this, we have a view to God's honour, and the general welfare of mankind. Else our labour is mere selfishness, that contracts and hardens our hearts, while it violates every obligation to God and man.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are seeking only the things of this world

[What have you gained by all your past exertions? You are pleased, perhaps, with your success, and have your pride gratified: but are you really happier than you were before you possessed your present honours and emoluments? Perhaps we may rather ask, Have you not, together with your means of self-indulgence, multiplied also your vexations and disappointments? But supposing you to be unusually favoured in these respects, we still ask, What comfort will these things afford you in the hour of death, and the day of judgment? Will they not then at least, whatever they may now do, appear to be lighter than vanity itself? Then in the name of God, "Seek them not."]

^s 1 John ii. 15.

^t Matt. vi. 24.

^u Matt. xvi. 26. Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^x Isaiah xliii. 21.

^y 1 Cor. vi. 20. 2 Cor. v. 15.

^z Phil. ii. 21.

^a Phil. ii. 4. and 1 Cor. x. 24.

If however you be determined to seek great things, we will change our voice, and say, "Seek them:" yes, seek them: only take care that they be truly *great*. Be not contented with the poor pitiful things of time and sense: let your ambition rise to the very throne of God, and all the glory of heaven. In pursuit of such things, you cannot aim too high; your eagerness cannot be excessive; your very selfishness becomes a virtue. Other things that you acquire are for yourselves and heirs; these shall be for yourselves alone, and that, for ever and ever.]

2. Those who profess to seek higher and better things

[Many a Baruch is to be found in the house of God: even the people who are truly beloved of the Lord, may need reproof for being too much cumbered about earthly things.^b If then such a character be present, let him consider the text as applied to himself in particular; Seekest thou great things unto thyself? thou, who professest to be dead to the world? thou who pretendest to walk in the steps of Christ? thou who boastest that thou hast God for thy portion? How dishonourable is such conduct! O "remember whence thou art fallen; and repent." Remember what was the root of Demas' apostasy:^c and know that the same root of bitterness, if nourished in your hearts, will bring forth the same malignant and destructive fruit. The best, the only antidote to this poison is, "the love of Christ shed abroad in your hearts."^d As a sight of the meridian sun unfits our organs of vision for beholding, for a time, any inferior objects, so will a sight of Christ efface the beauty of all sublunary things; or, to use the language of inspiration, "by the cross of Christ, the world will soon be crucified unto us, and we unto the world."^e]

^b John xi. 5. with Luke x. 41, 42.

^d 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^c 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^e Gal. vi. 14.

CCCCLXIII. THE NEARNESS OF SALVATION A MOTIVE TO DILIGENCE.

Rom. xiii. 11. *Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*

THE nearness of eternity may well excite us to improve the present hour—

This is a consideration as proper for believers as for unbelievers—

By it the Apostle stimulated to activity the Christians at Rome—

We shall consider

I. His exhortation

Persons, at their accustomed hour, arise from their beds, come forth to the light, and engage in the duties of their respective callings—

Now “it is high time” for us, (as the Apostle tells us, and “we know,”)

1. To shake off our stupor

[The wise virgins, no less than the foolish, slumbered and slept^a—

And the most zealous Christians at times are apt to grow remiss^b—

But it becomes us all to resist this propensity to the utmost—

And to redeem every moment of our time for God—]

2. To take a view of our prospects

[What glorious prospects has God set before us in his word!—

Should we not then be surveying them with admiration and joy?—

Should we be sleeping, when Christ and heaven are open to our view?^c—

Surely we should be ever standing as on Pisgah’s top^d—]

3. To prosecute our duties

[The Christian’s work demands the utmost energy of his soul—

Unless we engage with our whole hearts, we can never discharge the offices of love^e—

And are not multitudes around us “perishing for lack of knowledge?”—

Are not many of the saints also in need of consolation and support?—

What time then is there for loitering when so much is to be done?—]

That the exhortation may have due influence upon us, let us consider

^a Matt. xxv. 5.

^b Rev. ii. 2—4.

^c Luke ix. 29, 32.

^d Deut. iii. 25, 27.

^e These are particularly referred to. Compare ver. 8, 10. with the text.

II. The argument with which it is enforced

Every day, and every hour, the believer draws “nearer to”

1. The termination of his conflicts

[The nearer a racer comes to the goal, the more he stretches forth for the prize—

And shall not the Christian be animated by the thought, that all his temptations, trials, difficulties are nearly ended?—

Well may he endure with patience, or exert himself with vigour, when the moment of his eternal rest is nigh at hand—]

2. The period of his probation

[God has fixed the precise time for our continuance in his service—

And when that is arrived, we must “give account of our stewardship”—

Should we not then improve our talents with all diligence?—

It is in this way alone that we can hope to “give up our account with joy”—]

3. The consummation of his hopes

[What does the Christian look for, but a perfect conformity to God’s image, and a complete possession of his glory?—

‘And perhaps a few days, or hours, may bring him to the enjoyment of it all—

Blessed thought! who that entertains it, must not glow with ardent desire for the moment of his dissolution?^f—

And redouble his exertions to finish the work assigned him?^g—]

APPLICATION

[It is high time also for *unbelievers* to awake; for “their damnation slumbereth not”^h—

If they sleep a little longer, where, oh! where will they awake?ⁱ—

With what propriety may we address you, as Joshua did the Jews!^k—]

^f Phil. i. 23.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12.

^h 2 Pet. ii. 3.

ⁱ Luke xvi. 23, 24.

^k Josh. xviii. 3.

CCCXLIV. VIGILANCE PRESCRIBED.

Rom. xiii. 12. *The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.*

IT is the distinguished privilege of man that he is able to bring to his recollection things that are past, and to anticipate future events, so as to give them a kind of present existence in his mind. This power is of infinite use to him in the concerns of his soul. By means of it he can ascertain his state before God: he has only to compare the records of conscience with the declarations of God's word, and he can foresee the issue of the final judgment; and derive to himself the strongest arguments for vigilance and zeal. In this view the exhortation before us deserves our deepest attention: and to impress it on our minds, we shall

I. Confirm the truth of the Apostle's assertion

[Our Lord, in reference to the season afforded him for accomplishing his Father's work, calls this present life, *day*, and the future, *night*.^a The Apostle here uses the same metaphors, only reversing the application of them: the present life he designates by the name of "*night*;" and the future, by the appellation of "*day*."

The present life is called "*night*," because it is a state of intellectual and moral darkness. The ungodly "world are altogether lying in wickedness," and ignorant of all that it concerns them most to know—The regenerate themselves, "see but as in a glass darkly;" and, though they be light as day in comparison of carnal men, yet have they but, as it were, the twinkling of the stars, just sufficient to direct their course, or at most but as the early dawn, in comparison of the meridian light which they will hereafter enjoy. Much of sin also yet remains within them: much they do, which they would not; and leave undone, which they would do: by means of which they too often walk in darkness, instead of enjoying the light of God's countenance.

Our future state of existence is called "*day*," because all, whether godly or ungodly, will behold every thing in its true light; and because the empire of sin will be eternally destroyed.

Now this “night is far spent, and the day is at hand.” Considering how short the time is that is allotted us on earth, this may be spoken in reference to those who are even in the bloom of life. Twenty or thirty years cut off from the short span of life, may well be thought a great portion of it; and if those years be doubled, we must say indeed, “The night is *far* spent.” But whatever be our age, we are equally liable to be called away, and to have our time of probation cut short by death. We ourselves may recollect many, who but a year or two since, appeared as strong and healthy as ourselves, who are now no more. And, though we know not whose summons may arrive next, we are sure that, in a year or two more, many (perhaps one in twenty) of us will be fixed in our eternal state.]

But this truth being so clear, we may proceed to

II. Enforce the exhortation grounded upon it

[The idea which the Apostle’s language first suggests to the mind, is, that we are attacked in our camp, and summoned instantly to arise and fight.

The generality are at ease, involved in “works of darkness;” in works that proceed from the prince of darkness; in works that affect concealment; in works that lead to everlasting darkness and despair. From this state they have no desire to come forth. Even the godly have their “sins which most easily beset them,” and in which they are but too apt to indulge security. The wise virgins, as well as the foolish, were defective in vigilance. But, whatever be the works of darkness with which we are encompassed, we should “cast them off” with a determination never more to sleep upon the post of danger.

In opposition to these, we are required to clothe ourselves with righteousness, which, as “light,” is heaven-born, and approve its own excellence to all who behold it. This, as “armour” to the soul, protects it from the fiery darts of Satan, and aids it in all its conquests. In this we are to be ever clad, that we may be ready for the battle, and not have to look for our armour, when the enemy is at the door.^b Thus only shall we be “good soldiers of Jesus Christ;” but thus armed, we shall be “more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Now the urgency of this duty appears strongly as it is connected with the foregoing assertion. For, what is the work we have to do? it is no less than “putting off the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of light;” a work which none can perform, except he be strengthened by almighty

power. Besides, much of the time allotted for the performing of it, is spent already; and that which remains *must* be short, and *may be* terminated in an hour. Is it not “high time then that we should awake out of sleep?”^c Should we not begin without an hour’s delay, and “work with all our might?” Yes; let us all “gird on our armour, and fight the good fight of faith.”]

APPLICATION

[Have we neglected our spiritual concerns? What have we gained that can compensate for the loss of our precious time? And who is there amongst us that, if his day were now come, would not wish that he had watched and laboured for the good of his soul? Ah! remember that present things, however pleasing, will soon have passed away “as a dream when one awaketh,” and nothing remain to you but the painful recollection, that you have lost the time which you should have improved for eternity.]

Are we, on the contrary, attending to our spiritual concerns? Let us expect the present state to be a “night” of trial and affliction: but let us remember that the longest night has an end; and that “if sorrow endureth for a night, joy cometh in the morning.”]

^c Ver. 11.

CCCCLXV. EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE.

Heb. vi. 12. *Be not slothful, but followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.*

IN the general course of God’s providence we perceive that blessings are dispensed in proportion to men’s exertions in the pursuit of them: and though the Disposer of all events sees fit, on some occasions, to vary his dispensations, loading the slothful with opulence, and suffering the industrious to be in want, yet for the most part we behold diligence rewarded, and indolence put to shame. In spiritual things none are disappointed; labour is invariably attended with success: no one asks without receiving, or seeks without finding: God uniformly shews himself a rewarder of such as diligently seek him. “To him that studies to improve his talent, more is uniformly

given; and he is made to possess abundance.” The experience of the saints in all ages fully corresponds with this. No one ever suffered loss, but in consequence of his own remissness: nor did ever any one devote himself unfeignedly to God, without receiving grace sufficient in the time of need. The author of this Epistle confirms these observations: for, having spoken of those who apostatize from the truth, he tells the Hebrews, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation; for that they were active in every labour of love; which was to him a convincing evidence of their conversion to God. He then takes occasion to exhort them all to use the same diligence; and recommends them, if they would possess an assurance of hope, and enjoy it to the end, to press forward in the way which the patriarchal saints had trodden with such success. His words contain

I. A caution

There is scarcely any evil more universally prevalent than spiritual sloth

[In worldly concerns, sloth is often overcome by the force and influence of other propensities; the predominant affection of the mind, whatever it be, will often gain such an ascendancy, as to subdue the workings of less powerful corruptions: yea, to such a degree will interest or ambition lead us to mortify our love of ease, that we shall scarcely be sensible of the existence of sloth in our hearts. But, when once we turn our attention to spiritual things, this evil disposition will discover itself, and prove, that, notwithstanding it has hitherto been concealed from our view, it had taken deep root in our souls. In temporal things, our exertions are all on the side of nature (for, though we may feel some reluctance from contrary principles within us, we do not find it so difficult to surmount their opposition) but in spiritual things, we do not advance one step without conquering the united force of all our natural inclinations. Hence the evil, against which the Apostle cautions us, extends its empire over the whole world, and is to be resisted by every individual of mankind.]

Nor is there any evil which we are more concerned to subdue, seeing that it is

1. Repugnant to our duty

[A life of godliness is represented as a race, and a warfare, in order to convey to us some idea of the activity and perseverance necessary for a right discharge of our duty. Do

persons in a race find time to loiter? Have they their attention diverted by every trifle around them? Do they not press forward with unremitting ardour, and exert themselves the more as they approach the goal? Do they not bear in mind the prize, and strain every nerve to gain it? Look at those who are engaged in war, and arrived upon the field of battle; do they indulge security? Do they not watch the motions of the enemy, and animate one another to the combat, and endure almost insupportable fatigues, and expose themselves to the most imminent dangers, to defeat their enemies? If these then be fit images to represent the Christian's duty, what must we think of sloth? What propriety is there in these images, as applied to those who live regardless of eternity? Surely they rather form the strongest contrast to the whole life and conduct of such persons.]

2. Inconsistent with our profession

[Every one who calls himself a Christian professes to value his soul, to serve his God, to be seeking heaven. But what value has he for his soul, who prefers every vanity before it, and cannot be prevailed upon to seek its interests? What regard has he for God, who never manifests the smallest wish to please and honour him? What desire after heaven has he, who will not renounce one sin, or practise one duty to secure it? And how absurd is it to call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our conduct so flagrantly contradicts our profession!]

3. Subversive of our welfare

[Let the effects of sloth be viewed in those, who, in the judgment of charity, are not altogether destitute of true religion: how little victory have they over the world and their own corruptions, in comparison of what is attained by more diligent Christians! How little do they know of heavenly consolations! For the most part they are full of doubts and fears; and instead of enjoying that peace which passeth all understanding, they are harassed with the accusations of a guilty conscience. Their lamps being but seldom trimmed, they afford but a dim light to the world around them, and experience but little of the light of God's countenance in their soul's. Moreover, at the close of their day, they frequently set as the sun behind a cloud; and instead of having "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of their Lord," they leave the world, uncertain whither they are going, and, what shall be the issue of the future judgment. If we enquire into the cause of all this, we shall find it was sloth: they too often slumbered and slept, when they should have been watching unto prayer with all perseverance. If such then be the effects of sloth, where it gains only an *occasional* ascendancy, what must be the consequence of an *habitual* subjection to its

dominion? Alas! its willing captives can expect nothing, but to perish under the wrath of an offended God.^{a]}]

To this salutary caution the apostle adds

II. An exhortation

He proposes to our imitation the patriarchs and saints of old

These are described as “inheriting the promises”

[They had *not* indeed received the promised Messiah,^b having died long before he came into the world; but they had partaken in all the fruits and benefits, which he was in due time to purchase with his blood. When on earth, they, like minors, had enjoyed as much of the inheritance as had been judged proper for them; but now they were of full age, and had attained the full possession of *all* the promises; having been adopted into the family of God, and been begotten by his word and Spirit, they were heirs of God, and had God himself, together with all the glory of heaven, as their unalienable portion.]

The way by which they attained to this inheritance was, “by faith and patience”

[They had no claim whatever to it upon the ground of their own merit: they all looked to that “Lamb of God that was slain from the foundation of the world.” They all lived and “died in faith.” “To their faith they added patience.” They, no doubt, as well as we, had “fightings without, and fears within;” and sustained many sore conflicts both with the world around them, and with their own hearts. But they “ran their race with patience,” and “endured unto the end.”]

These therefore we should propose to ourselves as patterns; and should imitate

1. Their faith

[If we begin not here, we can never stir one step in the way to heaven. We must “have like precious faith with them,” renouncing all dependence on ourselves, and “making Christ our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption.”]

2. Their patience

[“If we set ourselves to seek the Lord, we must prepare our hearts for temptation.” Cain and Ishmael have their followers in every age. We must not be offended and turn aside on account of persecution, but must “possess our souls in pa-

^a Matt. xxv. 26.

^b Heb. xi. 39.

tience." Nor must the love of this present world, or the difficulties of our spiritual warfare, be permitted to divert us from the path of duty: having "put our hand to the plough, we must never look back," "lest having a promise left us of entering into God's rest, we should come short of it" at last.]

3. Their diligence

[It is in this view more especially that we are called to follow them; "Be not slothful, but imitate them." Even those amongst them, who, like Moses and David, had a kingdom to govern, were yet exceeding diligent in every duty of religion, devoting themselves entirely to the service of their God. Let us then tread in their steps: let us "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Let us "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and "whatever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might."]

If any **MOTIVES** be wanting to enforce the Apostle's advice, consider further

I. The effects of diligence in this life

[The more earnest we are in serving God, the more will our hearts be comforted, our fellow-creatures benefited, and God glorified. Let us place ourselves more especially on a death-bed, and look back from thence, not with pride and self-complacency, but with gratitude and thanksgiving, on a life devoted to God: and let us contrast our state with that of one who has never done any thing but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, or one who, though on the whole, pious, has filled his dying pillow with thorns by his remissness; and surely we shall want no other motive to fight a good fight, and war a good warfare.]

2. The consequences of it in the world to come

[There can be no doubt but that the greater our labour here, the richer will be our reward hereafter: and "one star will differ widely from another star in glory." It is true, the most eminent saint might well be satisfied, and magnify the divine goodness, if he be admitted to the lowest place in God's kingdom: but if our capacity for happiness will be enlarged by all that we do for God, and every man will be filled according to his capacity, should we not be encouraged to exert ourselves? Should we not "forget what is behind, and reach forward unto that which is before?" Should we be contented to suffer loss in heaven, merely because we do not lose heaven altogether?^c "Let us look to ourselves then, that we lose not the things we have wrought, but that we receive a *full reward.*"^d]

^c 1 Cor. iii. 15.

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^d 2 John 8.

CCCCLXVI. THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.

Heb. xii. 14. *Follow....holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

THE gospel, while it brings us into a state of reconciliation with God, enjoins us to maintain peace with man. This is rendered difficult, not only by the evil dispositions that are exercised on account of daily occurrences, but more especially by the enmity which subsists in the hearts of the generality with respect to religion; in reference to which our Lord himself said, "I come not to send peace on earth, but a sword." Much however may be done by means of patience, meekness, and forbearance; and it is our duty to sacrifice any thing, except a good conscience, for the sake of peace. But our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration: therefore the apostle, exhorting the Hebrews to "follow *peace* with all men," adds immediately, "and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord:" the import of which is, that we may fail in obtaining *peace*, however earnestly we may seek it; but *holiness* we may, and must, attain at the peril of our souls; for without it no man shall see the Lord.

We shall

I. Ascertain the nature of holiness

Holiness is a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God

But, to enter more fully into the subject, it implies

1. That we love the whole will of God

[There is not any thing that more truly characterizes a Christian than this: it draws a line of distinction between him and all other persons upon earth. The self-righteous Pharisee, and the most refined hypocrite, have secret objections against the law of God; they think its precepts too strict, and its sanctions too severe. They would be glad if it left them somewhat greater latitude. They would be content that it should forbid gross outward sins, and insist on the performance of outward duties: but that it should call for continual self-denial, that it should require brokenness of heart and contrition for the most secret offences, and demand the utmost exertion of all our faculties in the service of our God, this

appears too much: they would wish for an easier way to heaven.

But a person that possesses the smallest measure of true holiness, is the very reverse of this. He loathes himself for not complying more perfectly with the demands of the law; but he never condemns the law as too strict: he would not have it require one jot or tittle less than it does. He even admires and loves it for its purity; he says with David, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore thy servant loveth it." He acknowledges it to be not only "holy, and just, but good" also, and calculated to make every one happy that obeys it. And though he cannot obey it perfectly, he can truly say, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man:" yea, the language of his heart is, "O that my ways were made so direct, that I might keep thy statutes."]

2. That we live in no *allowed* deviation from it

[We mean not to say, that a Christian experiences no deviations from the law of God; (for, alas! he is conscious of many) but he does not *allow* them. Others will obey the will of God as far, as will consist with their interests and reputation; or with the exception of some bosom sin; but there will always be found, in insincere persons, some secret lust for which they plead, and in reference to which they say, "Pardon thy servant in this thing."]

But true holiness admits of no reserves, no limitations, no exceptions: and he who possesses it will stop short of nothing that God has commanded. He may do what is wrong, either through ignorance or temptation; but he will not persist in it: he will endeavour to mortify the whole body of sin. He will no more *allow himself* in secret sins, whether of omission or of commission, than he will commit the greatest enormities. Like David he says, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right, therefore I hate every false way;" that is, I love the ways of duty, so that I would walk in them even if there were no reward; and I hate the ways of sin, so that I would shun them, though I were sure never to incur punishment.]

That we actually grow in a conformity to it

[Sanctification is a progressive work. A child of God arrives not at full stature but by degrees: he is constantly growing in grace: the vernal bloom gradually advances to the autumnal fruit. There may indeed be seasons wherein he may appear to decline, or may really suffer a declension: but if he have the grace of God in his heart, he will revive, and return to God with more fervour and stedfastness. Nor will he ever think he has already attained, or is already perfect; but "forgetting the things that are behind, he will reach forward unto that which is before."

This is in no respect the case with others. They are satisfied with their present state: they are not conscious of their defects; and therefore they feel no longings for higher attainments. They are like a painted sun upon the canvass, while the true christian "grows up into Christ in all things as his living head," and like the sun in the firmament, "shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

Having in this deescription of holiness, marked the lowest degree of it that exists in a true Christian, we proceed to

II. Shew the grounds, on which it is necessary in order to salvation

If we were not able to assign any reason for God's determination, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that he has issued his decree. It is not for us to dispute, but to submit, saying,

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

But there is one obvious ground on which the necessity of holiness is indisputable, namely, that *in the very nature of things it is impossible without it to enjoy the divine presence*

[If heaven were a place suited to a carnal mind, and afforded the gratifications which unregenerate men affect, then indeed unholy men might find such happiness there, as in their state they are capable of receiving. But heaven is an *holy* place; the habitation of an *holy* God: it is filled with myriads of *holy* men and angels, who are exercising themselves incessantly in the *holy* employments of praise and adoration. What then would there be in that place suited to the taste of an *unholy* man? Could those whose spirits were defiled with sin, and who had never been purged from its guilt by the atoning blood of Christ, find pleasure in the presence of God, who, being omniscient, could not but discern their state, and, being *holy*, could not but regard them with abhorrence? Would not a consciousness of his power terrify them, and a recollection that he had once cast innumerable angels out of heaven, appal them? Could they delight in the society of the glorified saints whom they so little resemble, or find communion with them in exercises, which were here their burthen and aversion? We are fully assured, that "as the tree falleth, so it lieth;" that "he who is unjust, will be unjust still, and he who is filthy, will be filthy still." If it has not been the one desire of our hearts to honour and enjoy God; if secret intercourse with him in our chambers, and social fellowship with him in the public assembly, have been a mere task, and

not the delight of our souls, how can we suppose that we should instantly find a delight in these things in heaven? How could we endure to spend an eternity there in employments, for which we have no taste? We are told, that there is a "meetness for the inheritance of the saints:"^a and that we must have that meetness before we could enjoy the divine presence, even if we were admitted into it. Christ must be precious to us now, if we would find him so in the eternal world: and we must account it our supreme felicity to enjoy him now, if we would hereafter join the chorus of saints and angels, in ascribing "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever." In short, holiness, real holiness of heart, is as necessary to the enjoyment of the divine presence, as a taste for music, or literature, is for the company and employments of musical or literary men. As we soon grow weary of things, which we do not affect, and prefer any other employment that is more suited to our inclination and capacity, so most assuredly must it be even in heaven, if our natures be not changed: we shall remain forever destitute of those qualities which constitute our meetness for the heavenly inheritance, and consequently be for ever incapable of participating the joys of heaven.

This may at least be sufficient to illustrate the declaration in the text; perhaps we may add also, to vindicate it. Not that any declaration of God is to be judged of by the reasons which fallible men may assign in vindication of it: his word is the same, whether we believe it or not; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.]

This subject cannot but suggest to our minds the following REFLECTIONS:

1. How few are there that will eventually be saved!

[Take the foregoing explanation of holiness, and compare it with the state of all around us; how awful the contrast! — — — But God is true; and his word respecting the unholy shall surely stand — — — Let us "seek then, yea, strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow path" — — — Let us "follow" holiness with all our might — — — Whatever we may think, it is in that way alone that we can behold the face of God in peace.]

2. How needful is it that we should seek holiness in a right way!

[The generality are extremely ignorant respecting the manner in which holiness is to be obtained: they have an idea that they must acquire it by some exertions of their own:

^a Col. i. 12.

whereas they should seek it from Christ, through the operation of his Spirit in their hearts. They should first seek to be united to him by faith, as cyons to the stock of a tree, or a wife, to her husband: ^b then, by virtue derived from him, they will be made faithful in good works, and be “changed into his image in righteousness, and *true holiness.*”]

^b These are the very means prescribed by our Lord; John xv. 4, 5. and by St. Paul. Rom. vii. 4.

CCCCLXVII. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN.

Luke xi. 27, 28. *And it came to pass as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lift up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

THE words of our Lord, though made the continual subject of cavil and dispute amongst his obstinate opposers, carried conviction to the hearts of all who candidly considered them: nor was the gentleness of his manners less impressive than the wisdom of his discourses. He had been just exposing the folly of imputing his miracles to a confederacy with Beelzebub: and to such a degree had his discourse wrought upon one of his audience, that she exclaimed out of the midst of the multitude, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee,” &c. This was the most natural language for a woman to use in expressing her admiration of him: and it furnished him with an occasion to declare before all, who, and who only, could with propriety be accounted blessed.

In his answer he sets before us I. The character of the true Christian

Numberless are the ways in which this is drawn in the holy scriptures. But there is a peculiar simplicity in the description before us, at the same time that it very sufficiently distinguishes the Christian from all others.

1. "He hears the word of God"

[Every true Christian considers the preaching of the gospel as God's instituted means of converting and edifying the souls of men. Instead therefore of making frivolous excuses for staying at home, he will suffer many inconveniences rather than absent himself from public worship. And when he is there, he will "receive the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." He will listen to it as the word of God to his own soul in particular, and will apply to himself the truths which the minister, as God's ambassador, shall set before him.

In this he differs widely from all other persons: for though others may be regular in their attendance on divine ordinances, they do not hear the word of God with that reverence, that self-application, that submission, which become sinners in the presence of their God.]

2. He "keeps it"

[The godly keep it in their hearts, as a ground of hope.]

They do not come to the word of God, determining to receive nothing but what accords with their own preconceived notions; but they desire to know what method God has prescribed for the reconciling of sinners to himself: and when they find that he has sent his only dear Son to die for them, they do not say, How can this be? but they acquiesce thankfully in the divine appointment, and trust in Christ as their only Saviour— — —

They keep it also in their lives, as a rule of conduct. They will no longer regulate themselves according to the maxims of the world, but will enquire, What does my God require of me? What is the way in which he has directed me to walk? Having ascertained these points, he does not turn back because the world calls him precise, or because his own corruptions render his progress difficult; but he holds on in his course with firmness and uniformity. He finds many who endeavour to turn him out of the way; but he keeps the word of God, as "a light," that points out his path in general, and as "a lantern," that is to direct every step he takes— —

. It is scarcely needful to observe, that this part of the character is peculiar to the Christian; for there is no other person that can at all be compared with them in these respects.] ♦

Together with the character of a Christian our Lord proclaims also

II. His blessedness

We are not to take a general view of this subject, but

to consider it in that particular light, in which it is represented in the text.

The Virgin Mary, beyond a doubt, was the most highly favoured of women, in that she was honoured with bringing into the world her incarnate God. So the angel told her; and so she expected that all future ages would consider her.^a But the true Christian, whoever he be, is incomparably more blessed than her.^b

1. He has a closer union with Christ than ever she had

[The union which the Virgin had with Christ was that of a mother with her child. He was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh.^c Yet this, close as it was, cannot be compared with that which subsists between Christ and his believing people: for "he is formed in them;"^d "he dwells in their hearts by faith;"^e "he in them is the hope of glory;"^f and so inseparable is this privilege from the Christian character, that, "if he dwell not in us, we are reprobates."^g She was one flesh with him: but believers are one spirit with him.^h Her union was like that which universally obtains between parents and children; but that which believers enjoy, resembles rather that which subsists between Christ and his heavenly Father.ⁱ]

2. He has a more intimate communion with him

[Doubtless, till he attained to the age of thirty, she must have enjoyed many sweet seasons of communion with him under her own roof: and during the four years of his ministry, she must have had familiar access to him on many occasions. But, after all, this was no other fellowship than what every parent, and every friend, enjoys. She beheld him only as man; we behold him as God. She saw him as a prophet; we see him in the whole of his mediatorial character, as the King, Priest, and Prophet, of the universal church. She heard only *partial instructions*, on *particular occasions*, with the *outward ear*: but we have access to him *at all times*, to hear the *whole* of his revealed will, and to receive instruction in our *inmost souls*.

^a Luke i. 28, 48.

^b The Virgin, *as a believer in Jesus*, was doubtless a partaker of all the privileges that we enjoy through him: but, *simply as his mother*, she possessed none of them: and *all our assertions respecting her must be understood with this limitation*.

^c Gen. ii. 23.

^d Gal. iv. 19.

^e Eph. iii. 17.

^f Col. i. 27,

^g 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^h Cor. vi. 17.

ⁱ John xvii. 21—23.

How far preferable this is to his bodily presence our Lord himself informs us:^k and consequently our state is far more blessed than even that of his own mother.]

3. He has richer communications from him

[She, as his mother, received nothing from him in this world;^l nor does she receive any thing in heaven on account of this relation to him.^m But every believer, as a believer, is blessed in him with all spiritual and eternal blessings.ⁿ Unspeakable are the benefits he imparts to all his people. Whatever grace they possess, they have received it all out of his fulness.^o In heaven also their relation to him shall be acknowledged, and suitable honours be conferred upon them. A throne,^p a crown,^q a kingdom,^r are the inheritance that he has reserved for them, and will finally bestow upon them.

Let these things be considered, and, however blessed we may conceive the Virgin to have been on account of her relation to him, we shall see that incomparably greater blessedness is ours, provided we hear the word of God, and keep it.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who do not stately hear the word of God

[Upon what principle can you conceive that any blessedness belongs to you, when you prefer your ease, your business, your pleasure, to an attendance on God's ordinances? Can it be imagined that God is unconcerned about the honour of his word, and that he will not notice the contempt poured upon it? Has he not repeatedly declared the very reverse?^s Whatever excuses then you may make, remember that you have not even the semblance of Christianity, as long as you remain indifferent to the public ministration of the word, and neglectful of it in your secret retirements.]

2. Those who hear the word, but without keeping it

[There are many who are regular in their attendance on divine worship, but never regard one word they hear. They are taught to come to Christ as their righteousness and strength;^t but they still cherish self-righteousness and self-dependence. They are instructed to die unto the world, and to live unto God;^u but they still continue alive to the world, and dead to God. But what will their hearing profit them, if they will not keep the word they hear? To what purpose do

^k John xvi. 7.

^l Matt. xii. 46—50.

^m Matt. xxii. 30,

ⁿ Eph. i. 3.

^o John i. 16.

^p Rev. iii. 21.

^q 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^r Luke xxii. 29.

^s Deut. xviii. 19. Matt. x. 14, 15. Luke x. 16. 1 Thess. iv. 8. Heb. ii. 1—3.

^t Isaiah xlvi 24.

^u 1 Pet. ii. 24. 2 Cor. v. 15.

they cry, Lord, Lord, if they will not do his will?^x Let such then know that they deceive themselves;^y and that they must both embrace in their hearts, and exemplify in their lives, the word of God, if ever they would be blessed in their deeds.^x]

3. Those who both hear and keep it

[Whatever the world may say of these persons, they are, and shall be, blessed. The Lord Jesus Christ pronounces them so, and will himself impart the blessedness that he has reserved for them. Go on then, holding forth, and holding fast, the word of life.^a You will find numberless temptations to forsake the good way; but keep it stedfastly unto the end. You may meet with trials for your adherence to the word; but your consolations shall be sure to abound above all your tribulations;^b and strength shall be given you according to your day.^c Even in this world you shall have no reason to repent of your stedfastness; and in the world to come your blessedness shall be complete.]

^x Luke vi. 46.

^a Phil. ii. 16.

^y James i. 22.

^b 2 Cor. i. 5.

^z Ib. ver. 23—25.

^c Deut. xxxiii. 25.

CCCCLXVIII. THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN ZEAL.

Gal. iv. 18. *It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.*

MEN act with energy in things that are agreeable to them. But while some are earnest in the support of religion, others are no less active in opposing it. This was the case with the false teachers, who sought to exclude the Apostle, that they might extend their own influence in the churches of Galatia.^a But the Apostle justly condemns them, and recommends energy in a better cause.

The text will lead us to consider
I. The nature of Christian zeal

Zeal is a strong affection of the mind; and is good or

evil, according to the object towards which it is directed, and the manner in which it is exercised. It is more frequently in scripture spoken of as evil:^b But there is also a Christian zeal; which is distinguished by two things:

1. It is good in its object

[Some spend their zeal in things that are in themselves *sinful*:^c and others on things *indifferent*:^d but the Christian's zeal is directed to what is *good*: he maintains with stedfastness the faith of the gospel;^e and engages heartily in the practice of its precepts.^f]

2. It is uniform in its operation

[The zeal of many is only *occasional* and *partial*;^g but the Christian's is *uniform* and *universal*:^h it has respect to every duty; stimulating to private and personal, as well as public and official, duties. It does not, however, lay the same stress on trifles, as on the weightier matters of the law; but proportions its exercise to the importance of the things about which it is engaged.]

That such a zeal is truly praiseworthy, will appear, while we point out

II. Its excellence

The text pronounces it to be “good;” and not without reason; for

1. It is that which stamps a value on all other graces

[What are the most excellent graces without *this*? Faith is only a cold assent; hope, a mere doubtful expectation; and love, a general good-will, or rather, an empty name. The best of services without *this* is a worthless formality. But, on the other hand, the poorest and meanest service accompanied with *this*, is pleasing to God. The widow's mite surpassed the rich donations of the wealthy;ⁱ nor shall a cup of cold water lose its reward.^k

^b Acts v. 17, 18. and xiii. 45. and xvii. 5.

^c Phil. iii. 6. John xvi. 2.

^d Mark vii. 3, 4. And those amongst ourselves who raise fierce disputes about human ordinances.

^e He follows the injunctions and examples of the apostles in opposition to what is improperly called candour. Jude 3. Gal. i. 8, 9. 2 John ver. 10. ^f Tit. ii. 11, 12, 14.

^g It shews itself only in things that require little or no self-denial.

^h It “affects us always” not as a feverish, but a vital, heat; not as a meteor, but as the sun.

ⁱ Mark xii. 41—44.

^k Matt. x. 42. 2 Cor. viii. 12.

2. It is by that alone that we can honour God

[Lukewarm services declare, in fact, that God is not worthy of any better testimony of our esteem; and hence it is that they are so odious in his sight.¹ But, if we act with zeal, we silently, yet powerfully, proclaim to all, that God is worthy of all the love and honour we can render him. God himself testifies, that if we observe the sabbath in a becoming manner, we honour him:^m and the same is true of every other duty we perform.]

3. By this we may ensure success

[Exertion does not always command success in an earthly race or warfare. But in spiritual things none can fail who exert themselves with zeal *in God's appointed way*. “They shall know, who follow on to know the Lord;”ⁿ and to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, shall eternal life assuredly be given.^o Many seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and are not able: but none ever yet strove in vain.^p]

ADDRESS

1. Those who have no zeal at all in religion^q

[Whatever zeal men exercise in their worldly callings, few, alas! are much in earnest about religion. The natural man has no heart, no life or spirit in any thing he does for God. But will the heart-searching God be pleased with mere formal services? We ourselves do not accept them favourably at the hands of a fellow-creature; and shall God from us?^r If we would ever be approved of God, let us follow that injunction, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”^s]

2. Those who have declined in their zeal

[“When iniquity abounds, the love of many will wax cold.” And are there none amongst us who have “left off to behave themselves wisely;” none who have lost their first love? Let the solemn charge addressed to such persons in the primitive churches, be duly considered, and obediently regarded:^t for “it were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to turn from it.”^u]

3. Those who feel the importance and necessity of zeal

[Good as zeal is in a good cause, it may become perni-

¹ Rev. iii. 16.

^m Isaiah lviii. 13.

ⁿ Hos. vi. 3.

^o Rom. ii. 7.

^p Luke xiii. 24.

^q Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^r Eccl. ix. 10.

^s Rev. ii. 4, 5. and iii. 19.

^t 2 Pet. ii. 21.

cious both to ourselves and others, if it be not properly directed. There is “a zeal without knowledge,”^u which may easily be mistaken for Christian zeal. Let all then who would serve God acceptably, endeavour to have their zeal well regulated, both with respect to its objects, and the manner of its operation. Let their own sins, rather than the sins of others, and their own duties, rather than those of others, be the *first* objects of their regard. Let not a proud, bigotted, or vindictive spirit be cherished by them under the cloke of zeal;^x but let every duty to God or man be tempered with meekness, humility, and love. Let nothing bear such a preponderance in their mind as to make any other duty appear light and insignificant. Let the world, the family, and the closet, have each its proper portion of attention: and, with increasing ardor, let them follow Christ, whose “meat was to do the will of him that sent him.”^y]

^u Rom. x. 2.^x Luke ix. 54.^y John iv. 34.

CCCCLXIX. THE DUTY OF WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

John xii. 35, 36. *Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.*

THE perverseness of men in resisting the means of conviction, is apt to beget an asperity in the minds of their instructors, and to make them cease from their labours of love. But we are required “in meekness to instruct them that oppose themselves.” And our blessed Lord affords us in this respect an admirable example. He had plainly told the Jews, that he must be crucified: and their very answer shews that they understood his meaning. But, instead of receiving the information aright, they cavilled at it, and concluded from thence that he could not be the Messiah.^a Our Lord did not judge it proper at that time to afford them any farther means of conviction, when they had so abused those that were al-

ready afforded them: but he most affectionately warned them to improve their present advantages, before they should be finally withdrawn from them.

The words being equally applicable to us, we shall consider

I. The exhortation

Christ is here spoken of as “the light”

[We might consider the term “light” *in general*, as referring to the gospel: but *here* it undoubtedly relates to Christ himself.^b He is justly characterized by this name, not only as being the eternal fountain of light, but as enlightening the world by his doctrines and life.]

“In him,” under this character, we are to “believe”

[All that he has spoken respecting his person, work, and offices, together with all his promissory, or threatening declarations, should be received by us without gainsaying, and be relied upon without hesitation.]

“In him” also we ought to “walk”

[We view earthly things in the light of the material sun; and avail ourselves of its light, every step we take. Precisely thus should we act with respect to Christ, “the Sun of Righteousness.” We should view sin and holiness, time and eternity, yea, every thing without exception, in the light that HE, by his word and conduct, reflects upon it. Nor should we take any one step in life, without a direct reference to his word as our rule, and his life as our example.^c]

To render this exhortation more impressive, let us consider

II. The arguments with which it is enforced

There are three topics mentioned in the text, from whence we may urge this important duty

1. From the shortness of the time that we shall enjoy the light

[The Jews now had the light; but it was to be extinguished within the space of four days. Hence our Lord repeatedly urges this consideration. “Walk, while ye have the light.” And how strongly does this argument apply to us! You have the light at present, yea, even greater light than the Jews enjoyed under the ministry of Chsist: (for there were many subjects, which he did not fully open; and the things he did utter, could not be perfectly understood, till the day of Pen-

^b John i. 9. and viii. 12. and xii. 46.

^c 1 John ii. 6.

tecost; whereas you have Christ exhibited to you in all his glory; and the fulness, the freeness, the suitableness of his salvation constantly set before you.) But how soon may it be removed from you, or you from it!^d O then, “*while ye have the light, believe, and walk, in the light.*”]

2. From the danger we incur by disregarding the light

[If we will not attend to the voice of Christ, a “darkness will come upon us,” even “darkness that may be felt.” They who never have had Christ preached unto them, are indeed in an awful condition; but by no means so awful as that of those who have despised the gospel.^e The darkness of which the text speaks, is *judicial*, sent them by God as the punishment of their iniquity; and the very light that shines around them, serves only to increase their blindness, and to aggravate their guilt.^f In this state, “they stumble at the noon-day,” and wander, “not knowing whither they go;” till at last they fall into that pit of destruction, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth for evermore.

Should not then the dread of such a state lead us to a just improvement of our present privileges?]

3. From the benefit arising to those who rightly improve the light.

[By “children of light” we may understand either *children of God* (who is light) or, *truly enlightened persons.*^g In either sense the general import is the same, namely, that, by believing in Christ, we shall attain the knowledge and enjoyment of God. Compare this state with that of those who are in darkness; and how great will this benefit appear!]

Shall not then this blessed prospect allure us to embrace the gospel? Or shall we still prefer sin and misery to holiness and glory?]

APPLICATION

[Let us no longer withstand the solemn warnings, and affectionate exhortations of the Lord Jesus; but improve to the utmost this accepted time, this day of salvation.]

^d Rev. ii. 5. Amos viii. 11, 12.

^e Ver. 39, 40.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

^g Thus *ἱόντες ἀπειθεῖσας* is used; Eph. ii. 2. and *τέκνα κατάγασας*, 2 Pet. ii. 14. is so translated, as *ἱόντες φωτὸς* may be here.

CCCCLXX. THE ANGELS' SONG.

Luke ii. 13, 14. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.*

THE circumstances of our Saviour's birth characterize, in a measure, the dispensation which he came to introduce. The gospel exhibits a plain, yet profound, scheme of salvation: while its great outlines are intelligible to the meanest capacity, it abounds with the most sublime, and inscrutable mysteries. Thus, in the incarnation of our Lord, there was a meanness, which seemed unsuitable to such an occasion; and at the same time a majesty, that was worthy the person and character of the new-born infant: he was born, not in a palace, but a stable, and had only a manger for his reception: yet did an angel come from heaven to announce his birth; and a multitude of the heavenly host attended to proclaim his praise.

In this divine hymn the incarnation of Christ is represented in a threefold view;

I. As the brightest manifestation of the divine glory

[The angels had long beheld the unveiled face of the Deity; but never had they enjoyed so bright a discovery of the divine perfections as on this occasion. They had seen the *justice* of God in punishing the fallen angels; and some faint traces of his *mercy* in not executing similar judgments on fallen man: but what astonishing mercy beamed forth in the incarnation of his dear Son! and how inflexible did justice appear, when it would not pass by one offence without an adequate, an infinite, atonement! Their minds, it is probable, were prepared for this event: but still, as the accomplishment of it was gradually advanced, their views of it must be proportionably increased. No wonder then that they sang, “Glory to God in the highest;” since now, for the first time, they saw those attributes of the Deity which seemed most repugnant to each other, harmonizing, and reflecting lustre on each other, in the person of Christ.]

II. As the means of effecting “peace on earth”

[Man had arisen up in rebellion against his God, even as

the apostate angels had done before. But how different was the issue of the contest! the angels were cast down from heaven, and reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day: but peace was proclaimed on earth through the incarnation and sufferings of God's dear Son. The great Peace-maker was now come, to offer an atonement for the transgressions of man, and thereby to procure for him peace with God, and peace in his own conscience. Through him, God is reconciled to a guilty world, not imputing to them their trespasses: and, through him, every believing penitent may have joy and peace; and may look forward with confidence to that crown of righteousness and glory, which shall be given him in the day of final retribution.]

III. As the most astonishing display of God's "good-will to man"

[God had shewn his good-will to man in all his works both of creation and providence: but the most astonishing display of it was in the work of redemption, which was now soon to be completed by the holy child, Jesus. That God should bestow any benefit whatever on such worthless creatures, was amazing: but that he should give his only-begotten Son to take our nature, and to bear our sins; and that he should do this for *men*, when he had made no such provision for the fallen angels;^a this was good-will indeed; such as must fill all heaven with wonder for ever and ever.]

Having endeavoured to elucidate the brief expressions of this divine hymn, we would propose the conduct of the angels for our imitation

1. Let us praise God ourselves

[The angels were not so much interested in this event as we; yet they adored and magnified their God on account of it. Let not us then, whose hopes are altogether founded on it, keep silence. Let us rather contemplate the great ends of the Saviour's incarnation, till we are inflamed with love to his name, and constrained to sing, "Glory to God in the highest."]

2. Let us declare his love to others

[Not content to worship God themselves, the angels endeavoured to stimulate others by their information and ex-

^a This thought was likely to make the deepest impression on the minds of *angels*; and in that view may be considered as forming a climax: whereas, if we do not advert to that circumstance, the whole song appears an anti-climax.

ample. Let us then say to others, "Behold, we bring you glad tidings of great joy; for unto you is born a Saviour." Let us tell them where and how they may find him;^b and that, in finding him, they will obtain peace unto their souls. This was an employment worthy of angels; and we, "if we thus water others, shall be watered also ourselves."]

^b Ver. 11, 12.

CCCCLXXI. THE POWER AND WISDOM OF GOD.

Ps. cxlvii. 5—7. *Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The Lord liftest up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.*

AN acquaintance with God is the only source of solid and lasting peace—

It is by that alone that we can ascertain the extent of our guilt and danger—

Or be brought to accept the salvation offered us in the gospel—

The Psalmist sets God before us, both in his essential attributes, and his dealings with mankind—

And those two points duly weighed, we shall readily comply with the exhortation addressed to us—

We shall consider

I. The attributes here ascribed to God

The power of God is exceeding great

[It is visible to all in the various *works of creation*^a—

We cannot but admire it in the beauty, order, connexion, and influence of the heavenly bodies—

The earth, with every thing upon it, furnishes amazing proofs of it—

Who can reflect on all, as formed out of nothing,^b with perfect ease,^c and in an instant,^d and not confess an omnipotent agent?—

The meanest insect, no less than the largest planet, proclaims the infinite power of him who formed it—

^a Rom. i. 20.

^c Ps. cxlviii. 5.

^b Heb. xi. 3.

^d Gen. i. 3.

The works of Providence also discover the same divine energy—

Every moment does the hand of God uphold the universe in its order—

Were he to withdraw his influence, the creation would instantly become a chaos—

Nor is his power less conspicuous in suspending, than in maintaining, the established laws of nature^e]—

The understanding of God is infinite

[This, no less than his power, is discoverable in all his works—

Indeed, without this, his power would excite nothing but terror in our minds—

It is the union of these attributes that renders each of them amiable—

Either of them without the other might be counteracted—

But their united exercise secures to God the accomplishment of his eternal purpose—

And makes him at once a proper object of our fear and confidence—]

In these attributes we are deeply interested

II. The manner in which they are exercised

God, as the moral governor of the world, overrules the most contingent circumstances for his own glory

He liftest up the meek

[Meekness is a disposition strongly characteristic of the righteous—

There are some indeed who are naturally of a kind and gentle spirit—

But the meekness of a true Christian differs widely from any natural endowment—

It is a temper of mind arising from a sense of guilt and helplessness^f—

And it is always accompanied with an unreserved surrender of the soul to the will of God—

This is a disposition peculiarly approved and beloved of God^g—

^e Whether he arrest the sun and moon in their career, or suspend the flow of waters, and the action of fire (Exod. xiv. 22. Dan. iii. 27.) or restrain the savage appetite of lions, (Dan. vi. 27.) or preserve his prophet in the belly of a fish, (Jonah i. 17.) we are necessitated to acknowledge the hand of Omnipotence, and to say, This hath God done.

^f Isaiah lxi. 1.

^g 1 Pet. iii. 4.

They, who possess it, are emphatically pronounced "blessed"^h—

God will surely appear for the support and comfort of their soulsⁱ—

Like the Persian monarch,^k he will not long be deaf to their entreaties—

He will lift up the light of his countenance upon them—

And at last exalt them to a throne of glory—]

The wicked he casteth down to the ground

[The wicked are properly contrasted with the meek—

A want of humility and contrition is visible in all unregenerate persons—

Nor can any difference of external character atone for this defect—

All who are destitute of that "meekness which is the fruit of his Spirit," are decidedly wicked in the sight of God—

These God will cast "down," as monuments of his wrath and indignation—

Sometimes he brings them down in mercy, as he did the persecuting Saul^l—

Then, as in that instance, he altogether renews their hearts—

But frequently he abases them by visible marks of his displeasure^m—

And hurls them at last into the bottomless abyss of hell—

Sooner or later they shall all be witnesses of the truth of that prophecy.ⁿ]

Nor are these by any means inconsiderable efforts of God's wisdom and power

[Not all the hosts of heaven could contrive a way to comfort a dejected soul—

Or to lift up one who is bowed down under temptation and guilt—

To administer effectual relief is a work of omnipotence—

Hence it is compared to the raising of Christ from the grave, and the setting of him above all the principalities and powers of heaven^o—

Nor is created power able to abase the proud in heart—

We may subdue the body, but none can change the disposition of the soul—

Hence God himself represents this as the prerogative of himself alone^p—]

While we behold these things we should be suitably affected by them

^h Matt. v.

ⁱ Isaiah lxi. 3.

^k Esther viii. 3, 4.

^l Acts ix. 4.

^m Acts xii. 23.

ⁿ Isaiah ii. 11.

^o Eph. i. 19, 20.

^p Job xl. 11. Dan. iv. 37.

III. The effect which this view of them should produce upon us

The glorified saints and angels are incessantly occupied in songs of praise—

Such should be our employment also, while we contemplate God's power and wisdom

1. Even the wicked should sing to him with thanksgiving

[Doubtless, if they continue wicked, they have cause to tremble—

They will never be able either to elude or avert his wrath—

But it should be matter of joy to reflect that God is able to save them—

If they seek him with humility, his power and wisdom shall be exercised on their behalf—

God “knows how to deliver” them from their most inveterate lusts—

And to give them such an heart, as he himself will approve—

Let the wicked then attend to the prophet's encouraging address^a—

Let them adore God for his forbearance and tender mercy—

So shall that promise be assuredly fulfilled to them^r]—

2. The meek in particular have reason to tune their harps to his praise

[They indeed are often troubled on account of their remaining infirmities—

And are ready to conclude from their own feelings, that they are forsaken of God—

But the consideration of God's wisdom and power would soon relieve them—

* This was proposed to the church of old as the richest source of consolation—

Let the meek then reflect, what an almighty protector they have—

May they not well adopt the triumphant language of St. Paul?^t—

Let them consider too what an all-sufficient friend is watching over them—

How wise he is to discover, and how mighty to defeat, their subtle adversary!—

^a Zeph. ii. 3.
Isaiah xl. 27, 28.

^r Ezek. xviii. 27.
^t Rom. viii. 31.

Above all, let them recollect what a rewarder they have in heaven—

How exalted must that glory be, which infinite wisdom and power have been exerted to prepare!—

In the view of these things, let them “increase their joy in the Lord”^u—

Thus, beginning their songs on earth, they shall ere long swell the chorus in heaven—]

^u Isaiah xxix. 19.

CCCCLXXII. JOY IN CHRIST.

Ps. cxlix. 2. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.*

IT appears somewhat strange that a religion coming from heaven, and purporting to make men happy, should almost universally be considered as a source of melancholy, and as destructive of all personal and social comfort. But it may be easily accounted for: religion calls men from the pleasures of sin, and promises them sublimer pleasures in its stead. But unregenerate men, knowing nothing of spiritual joy, have no idea that any such thing exists; whereas the joys, which they are to sacrifice, have afforded them many a delicious feast. Hence, till, through faith in the divine records, they feel the bitterness of sin, or taste the felicity of God’s chosen, they will and must suppose, that they are called to relinquish what is substantial, and to grasp a shadow. But the saints of old have invariably attested, that religion’s ways are ways of pleasantness and peace: and David, who was no incompetent judge of this matter, exhorts every subject of the Redeemer’s kingdom to rejoice in Zion’s King. We shall

I. Explain his exhortation

Who are the children of Zion?

[Not every man by nature, seeing we are “children of wrath;”^a not any man by education, since it is beyond the

power of man to convey to others such principles and dispositions, as are necessary to bring them into that near relation to the church of God:^b we must be born from above, through the influence of God's word and Spirit:^c and, till a supernatural change has been wrought on all the faculties of our souls by God himself, whatever we may profess to be, we are, beyond a doubt, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.^{d]}

Who is their King?

[It is to Christ alone that this name belongs.^e He is indeed the King of all the earth, and has the whole creation under his control. But, in this sense many are his subjects, who despise his person and hate his government: whereas over Zion he reigns by the most cordial consent of all his people, there not being so much as one who does not know him, love him, serve him, and desire the very thoughts of his heart to be subjected to his law. On the other hand, he affords them his protection, supplies their every want, and makes them victorious over all their enemies.]

What is their duty towards him?

[It is not sufficient that they yield obedience to his will, as slaves to a tyrant whom they fear: they must love his person, delight in his commands, be zealous for his glory, and rely humbly on his care. In a word, they must rejoice in him. This is essential to the Christian character:^f and, if, we attain not to this spirit, we are more inexcusable than the Jews, and obnoxious to a heavier doom.^g We say not indeed that the children of Zion are never to mourn: for mourning is both introductory to joy and consistent with it; yea, it is even a very necessary ingredient of that joy, which we ought to feel in the contemplation of Christ's character and offices: and the more fervently we love him, the more deeply shall we lament, that our love and joy are so disproportioned to his worth.]

The several parts of the exhortation being explained, we shall

II. Enforce it

Here, changing only the order, each part that has been explained, suggests a powerful argument for rejoicing in Christ. Consider

^b 1 Cor. iii.. 7. John i. 13

^c 1 Pet. i. 23.

^d 2 Cor. v. 17. John iii. 5.

^e Zech. ix. 9.

^f Phil. iv. 4. and iii. 3.

^g Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

1. The duty itself

[What can be more *pleasant*? It is not to any painful duty we are called, but to rejoice, and to have all the faculties of our souls engaged in the very employment of heaven. What can be more *reasonable*? If religion furnished us with no grounds of joy, or were as empty and unsatisfying as the world, it would be unreasonable to expect any happiness to flow from it: but it sets before us innumerable occasions of joy; and not only permits, but enjoins, us to bear our part in the felicity of God's chosen. Shall we not then obey the call?]

2. The object in whom we are to rejoice

[This is none other than our adorable Emmanuel, who combines in himself all the perfections of the Godhead, and all the excellencies of the most spotless manhood. Moreover, the love he has manifested towards his subjects, is such as infinitely surpasses our highest conceptions: he assumed our nature, and died for us, while we were in actual rebellion against him. And, what a delightful sway does he exercise over them! So light and easy is his yoke, that there is not one of his laws, no, not one, which may not be summed up in this, *Be happy*. What rewards too does he bestow, not on a few favourites only, but on all his subjects! There is not one of them whom he does not make a king like unto himself, and place upon a throne like unto that on which he himself is seated at the right hand of God.^h Shall we refuse to rejoice in such a King as this?]

3. The persons called upon to rejoice

[If this exhortation were addressed to the children of this world, they might reply, We know him not; we see no beauty in him for which he is to be desired; nor have we cause to expect any thing at his hands but wrath and fiery indignation: how then shall we rejoice in him? But the children of Zion know that "he is fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely:" they have experienced the virtue of his blood to purge a guilty conscience, and the efficacy of his grace to sanctify a polluted heart. For them he makes continual intercession in the presence of God; for them he every moment exercises his almighty power; and for them he is coming shortly to judge the world, that he may take them to himself, to behold his glory, and participate his blessedness, for ever and ever. Shall they then be reluctant to comply? Surely, if they be, "the very stones must cry out against them."ⁱ]

ADDRESS

1. To those who have never yet rejoiced in Christ

[What relation can you have to Zion? How can it be

^h Rev. i. 6. John xiv. 3.

ⁱ Luke xix. 40.

said of you, This man was born in her?^k And what excuse can you urge before God? Your ignorance of Christ? This is your sin, and not your excuse. He is willing to make you happy under his government, if you will submit yourselves unto him. "Kiss him" then, in token of your reverence and subjection, "lest he be angry, and ye perish for ever."^l]

2. To those who are going on their way rejoicing

[Take care that you make Christ, and not your own frames or feelings, the object and ground of your joy. And guard against pride, self-confidence, and sin of whatever kind, knowing that such things will vitiate, and destroy, all the happiness of the soul. David's advice must ever be attended to, "Rejoice with trembling."^m]

^k Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 6.

^l Ps. ii. 12.

^m Ib. ver. 11.

CCCCLXXIII. THE DUTY OF PRAISING GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS.

Ps. cxlix. 4—6. *The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand.*

THE world are ready to account those weak and enthusiastic who abound in the exercise of spiritual duties: but there is nothing in the universe that more accords with the dictates of reason, than such a state. If God have not given us sufficient grounds to love and serve him, then we may doubt whether the supreme affection of our souls be due to him. But we need go no further than the text in order to justify the warmest expressions of our love to him, and the most unreserved dedication of all our powers to his service.

The exhortations in the text are full of energy; but they are founded on God's love to us. In order therefore to be duly sensible of their force we must consider

I. God's kindness to us

This is expressed both by the internal regard which he bears towards us, and by the outward manifestations of it to our souls.

1. He loves his people

[They who fear God are considered as “*his people*,” in contradistinction to those who belong to Satan. He esteems them as “*his peculiar treasure.*”^a He “*has pleasure*” in *their persons*, notwithstanding all their vileness; for he views them as “*complete in Christ.*”^b When they are mourning and weeping for their extreme sinfulness, he looks on them with heart-felt complacency,^c and delight.^d Even when they are doubting his love towards them, he marks them as the objects of his tenderest affection, and incessant care.^e

He takes pleasure also in *their services*. Their prayers are his delight:^f their tributes of praise are esteemed his glory;^g their alms, a sacrifice with which he is well pleased:^h their every grace is in his sight of great price.ⁱ Their holy purposes, though not suffered by him to be carried into effect, are noticed by him with approbation,^k nor are even their fainter inclinations,^l or their transient thoughts^m suffered to pass without a suitable reward.]

2. He makes them lovely

[The distinguishing characteristic of the Lord’s people is, that they are “*meek*:” their hearts being humbled, their proud impetuous passions are hushed to silence. These the Lord “*beautifies with salvation*” now. The lion becomes a lamb:ⁿ instead of the brier and thorn, the fir an myrtle-tree spring up:^o and even blood-thirsty murderers become humble and loving saints.^p The very countenances of God’s people often bear a visible mark of the change wrought in them; so that we may almost literally say, “*They have the mark of the Lamb in their foreheads.*”^q There is a beautiful symmetry discernible in all their conduct. “*The beauty of the Lord their God is upon them:*”^r and as that consists, not in the exercise of any one perfection, but in an union and harmony of all, however opposite to human appearance; so their beauty is seen, not in the exercise merely of meekness or fortitude, of fear or confidence, but in the just temperament, and combination, of every Christian grace. In a word, they are renewed after God’s image;^s and have the change carried on from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of the Lord.^t

But in an infinitely higher degree will they be beautified when *their salvation shall be complete*. Then they shall have

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- ^a Exod. xix. 5. ^b Col. ii. 10. ^c Isaiah lxvi. 2. Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.
^d Prov. xi. 20. ^e Isaiah xlix. 14—16. ^f Prov. xv. 8.
^g Ps. l. 23. ^h Heb. xiii. 16. ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 4.
^k 1 Kings viii. 18. ^l 1 Kings xiv. 13. ^m Mal. iii. 16.
ⁿ Isaiah xi. 6. ^o Isaiah lv. 13. ^p Acts ii. 23, 41—47.
^q Rev. xxii. 4. ^r Ps. xc. 17. ^s Eph. iv. 24.
^t 2 Cor. iii. 18.

no remains of sin or corruption: their bodies shall be made like unto Christ's glorious body:^u their souls also shall be without spot or blemish, as truly as his:^x arrayed in the robes of his perfect righteousness, and adorned with the crown of glory,^y they shall shine forth above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever.^z And when Christ himself shall come in his glory, he will be admired *in* them, and glorified *in* them.^{a]}

After viewing the obligations we owe to God, we cannot but be prepared to hear

II. Our duty to him

There is a correspondence between the mercies we receive from God, and the service which he requires at our hands: does he take pleasure in us? we should delight ourselves in him: does he exert himself to beautify us? we should labour to glorify him.

1. We should delight ourselves in God

[They whom God has set apart for himself as "his people," and rendered "meek" after the example of Jesus, are properly called "his saints:" and though men scoff at that name, and make it a term of reproach, they whom God has honoured with it, have reason to rejoice and glory in such an honourable appellation. With *them*, praise should be the subject of their thoughts, the language of their lips, the very element in which they breathe.^b It is their privilege as well as their duty to rejoice in the Lord, to rejoice in him evermore,^c to rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.^d When they rise in the morning, their praise should arise as incense; yea, when they are lying "upon their beds," they should have their waking thoughts occupied with God, and "sing aloud" for joy. Nor should they be contented with the solitary expressions of their love to God; they should commend him to others, and stir up all around them to magnify his name. Such was the delightful employment of the Psalmist;^e and such a devotedness of soul to God is no other than our reasonable service.^{f]}]

2. We should fight the Lord's battles

[The Jews were to approve their love to God by extirpating his enemies among the heathen. There are enemies also with whom he requires *us* to contend: but "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal;" it is not our fellow-creatures that we

^u Phil. iii. 21.

^v Eph. v. 27.

^w Rev. vi. 11, & vii. 14. 2 Tm. iv. 8.

^x Dan. xii. 3. Matt. xiii. 43.

^y 2 Thess. i. 10.

^z Ps. xxxviii. 1.

^a Phil. iv. 4.

^b 1 Pet. i. 8.

^c Ps. lxxiii. 3—6. and cxlv. 5—7.

^d Rom. xii. 1.

are called to destroy, but “our lusts that war in our members.” The world, the flesh, and the devil are our enemies, and God’s. Against them we vowed eternal enmity in our baptism; nor are we ever to sheathe the sword till they are all put under our feet. God has prepared for us a divine panoply, an armour of heavenly temper.^g Clad with this, we must “go forth continually conquering, and to conquer.” We must “fight a good fight,” and “war a good warfare,”^h and “endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”ⁱ

Thus *fighting and singing must be joined together*; for “the joy of the Lord is our strength:”^k and then shall we be most victorious, when we go forth to battle singing the praises of our God.^l]

ADDRESS

Those who rest satisfied with a mere formal religion

[What suitableness is there in such a state to the mercies we receive at God’s hands? If he take pleasure in us, should we be indifferent towards him? If he labour to beautify us, should we take no pains to glorify him? If he call us to holy joy, should we be cold or lukewarm? If he command us to maintain a continual warfare, should we yield ourselves willing captives to our enemies, or make a truce with them for a moment? Be it known, that whatever the world may think of such a state, God utterly abhors it.^m]

2. Those who profess to serve and enjoy God

[Glorious indeed is “the vocation wherewith ye are called:” and well may you rejoice in it: but oh! be careful also to “walk worthy of it.”ⁿ If you profess that God has pleasure in you, take care that you are also adorned and beautified with his divine image. If you rejoice and glory in God, take care also that the sword is ever in your hand, to cut off whatever is displeasing in his sight.^o Beware also lest you decline from the happy state to which you have been brought: beware lest by cowardice or sloth, you rob your soul of its beauty and happiness, and make him your enemy, who desires nothing so much as to shew himself your friend.^p]

^g Eph. vi. 13—17. ^h 1 Tim. i. 18. and vi. 12. ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

^k Neh. viii. 10. ^l 2 Chron. xx. 21—23. ^m Rev. iii. 16.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 1. ^o Matt. xviii. 7—9. ^p Isaiah. lxiii. 10.

